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THE BLACK SPY;

OR,

THE YELLOWSTONE TRAIL.

BY CAPTAIN J. F. C. ADAMS,

AUTHOR OF DIME NOVEL No. 322, "OLD GRIZZLY," ETC., ETC.

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THE BLACK SPY.

CHAPTER I.

THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

"I'LL bet twenty-four thousand dollars dat I'll do it. Come now, if you means biz, plank down de rhino."

"Catamounts and rattlesnakes! I couldn't raise more nor twenty-four cents to save my ha'r, and how kin I bet you such a pile as that? Whar's your spondulicks?"

"Dat's all right," replied the darkey, with a wise shake of the head. "It don't make no difference whether I hab dat loose change 'round my garments or not; it's on deposit in St. Loney at de Bank ob Jubilee, and all dat I have to do am to draw my check fur it."

"I don't want to 'arn my money in that 'ar style, and what I mean to say ar' that, if you undertook to take a look into that Sioux camp just as sartin will it be your last look. I ca'c'late I'm a little older nor you, or know something more of the woods and the varmints that live in 'em nor you do."

The brief conversation, given above, took place between Cuff Tompkins, a short, jet-black darkey, upon the one hand, and Long Ike, a grizzled, scarred, and weather-beaten trapper of the North-west. They were well up one of the tributaries of the Upper Missouri, and at the moment they are introduced to the reader were standing under the face of a cliff that overhung the river, where the additional shelter of some trees and bushes made both feel secure from interruption from enemies. Both were armed with pistol, knife and gun, and their horses were safely corraled, where they could be reached without trouble in case of necessity.

A small canoe, drawn up the bank at their feet, with the prow pointed up-stream, indicated the direction from which they had come, while the hunter, pointing down the river to

the Sioux camp, showed where the particular danger lay to which he referred.

The darkey, as we have already said, was short, stumpy, with an oily, good-natured face, and during the short time that he had been in this wild region, he seemed to have picked up an extraordinary amount of knowledge of its characteristics, and he showed it now in the confident assertion that he meant to enter and return from the Sioux camp, where he had reason to believe that several dear friends of his were held, with their lives in the most imminent danger.

It was now well on in the afternoon, and when the sun rose that morning, neither of these two parties had the remotest suspicion of the existence of the other.

Long Ike was lying underneath a fallen tree, with his blanket folded under his head for a pillow, and was in a sound sleep, when he was awakened by the neighing of his horse, that was nibbling the grass near at hand. Long years of training caused him to open his eyes like a flash, and as wide awake as ever he was in his life.

He had but to wait a few minutes, when the tramp of a horse was heard, and to his surprise, the darkey, Cuff Tompkins, suddenly came to view, mounted upon a fine animal. He quickly explained what his appearance in this place meant. He was attached to a small party of tourists, that were on their way to Fort Leavenworth, under charge of a hunter, and they had encamped at a point several miles away, where they believed there were no signs of danger. On this morning, the day was so beautiful, the weather so exhilarating and tempting, that their guide had given them permission to separate and spend a few hours in hunting, all agreeing to meet at this place at noon, and resume their journey. The meeting, as far as possible, took place at noon, when an awful and appalling discovery was made. One of the men, hearing the report of firearms, rode to the top of a wooded hill, where he saw their guide engaged in a desperate hand-to-hand conflict with fully a half-dozen Sioux Indians, and he had scarcely time to realize the frightful situation, when he saw the brave fellow literally cut to pieces before his eyes.

Transfixed by the fascination of the terrible scene, his horrified vision the next moment was treated to the sight of

the scalping of the poor wretch, when the party with shouts and yells started in a direction that led so near by to where he was sitting upon his horse, that he wheeled about and dashed away at full speed.

This was bad enough, but the situation of the little party was made ten times more terrible by the fact that two of the party were missing. They were George Parham and Rosalie Blackwood, who, when last seen, were riding away in company with the guide, so that there was every reason to fear the worst regarding them.

After a long and gloomy consultation, it was agreed that they should remain where they were until the morrow, when, if nothing was seen or heard of the missing couple, the party would press on westward toward their destination. As it was known that there were hostile Indians so near at hand, the company remained together for the purpose of self-protection, while Cuff was the only one of the party to start out to search upon his own account.

We have already shown how it was, that he came upon Long Ike, and explained the circumstances, after which they "joined forces," as may be said.

It happened that Long Ike, the hunter, knew all the particular warriors who had committed this murder. They belonged to a war-party that had been eastward, toward Minnesota, perpetrating the most revolting outrages, and they were under the leadership of a half-breed, known and dreaded for his ferocious disposition that delighted in nothing so much as rapine and blood, and he told Cuff that if the lady and gentleman for whom he was searching were in their hands, he might as well turn back, and save his own carcass, by getting out of the country as speedily as possible, while he had the opportunity of doing so.

But Cuff was not to be dissuaded from the humane errand upon which he had started, and he finally persuaded Ike to row him down the stream, to where we find them standing at the moment. When the trapper had gone this distance, he absolutely refused to go any further. The whole Sioux war-party were encamped on the other side the stream, and only by the greatest care and caution had they been enabled to approach thus close and make a landing without being seen

When Cuff found that his new acquaintance would go no further, at least in this manner, he declared that he would reconnoiter the camp himself, and that he knew he could do it in safety, whereupon ensued the conversation with which our story opens.

Cuff meant what he said too. He listened carefully to what the hunter told him of the diabolical character of these Sioux, whom he held in greater dread than he did any of the Indians of the North-west, and then he replied with the air of a philosopher or a—fool, "Dat's all werry true, and I ain't a-gwine to tell yer dat you're lyin' if I does t'ink dat you kin lead me in tellin sich whoppers, but I's a-gwine nebbberless right in among dem Injins, and am gwine to make a s'arch for dem folks, and when I gits frough I'll lebe, jist de same dat I'll lebe you."

Very naturally Long Ike looked upon the darkey as an idiot. If he himself, with all his skill and experience, dare not show himself within sight of the Sioux camp, he felt that no other living person dare make the attempt. And how ludicrously absurd that this African, who according to his own admission, had not been a month upon the plains, should presume upon such a thing!

"You's afeard to make de bet," added Cuff, pompously, "and all dat I ax is dat you'll lend me your canoe, and den you kin watch. If I doesn't come back and got my horse afore twelve o'clock to-night, you kin make up your mind dat I've lost; but if you find de hoss gone, den I've won my bet, and de next time you come into St. Louey, you kin call at my office and settle."

"Wal, if you want to go to glory from a camp of Sioux varmints, go on," replied the disgusted trapper, as he turned his back upon him; and Cuff showed how serious his intentions were, by at once stepping into the canoe, seizing the paddle and starting straight across the stream for the Sioux camp upon the opposite side.

The amazed trapper stood for a minute peeping through the bushes, and then, with a muttered exclamation, he moved around toward the rear of the cliff, when he climbed to the top, and, on his hands and knees, crawled to the very edge, so that he was directly over the river flowing beneath, and at a hight of nearly fifty feet.

No better view could be obtained of the stream, and the wood upon the opposite side, where the dreaded war-party of Sioux had gone into camp; but, as the spot was fully a quarter of a mile distant, this of itself would have rendered his vision imperfect, but for the aid which science gave the trapper. He drew from an inner pocket of his hunting-shirt a small, excellent and powerful telescope, which he leveled, not at the camp, but at the negro Cuff, in his canoe.

He had scrutinized the camp as well as possible, on coming down the river in the canoe, but had been unable to learn any thing satisfactory, and he now devoted himself to watching the negro's actions, as he would have watched those of a clown, who had agreed to play some tomfoolery and end it all with his own suicide.

It can not be said that Cuff was much of a success as an oarsman, but the current was in his favor, and by pulling steadily with his lusty muscle, he made tolerable progress toward the camp of the Sioux.

The latter observed him while he was still a good distance, and as the darkey looked back over his shoulder, he could see half a dozen of the painted wretches standing on the shore, guns in hand, as if waiting to give him a salute, when he should approach near enough.

"Golly! wonder if they'll fire at a feller," exclaimed Cuff as he ceased rowing to scratch his head and cogitate over the matter. "I didn't t'ink ob dat."

Taking another look at the group, he concluded that matters looked so threatening, that a change of tactics would have to be adopted.

"I guess I'll raise a flag of truce," concluded the darkey, believing that to be the only thing possible for him to do. "Dey's wery much skeer'd at seeing me coming down upon them so bold and saucy-like, and I'll be more gradual-like."

Stowed away in the top of his hat was a handkerchief, which had once been white, but was now little nearer the negro's own hue. But he unhesitatingly raised it over his head, and waved it back and forth, until he made sure that the Sioux saw him. Then he ingeniously twisted it around one end of his ramrod, and shoved the other end a little distance down the back of his neck. The advantage of thus making a flag

staff of himself was that it gave him the use of both arms without pulling down his sign of neutrality.

It escaped the notice of Cuff altogether that, at the moment he resumed paddling, the wind blew the flag free, and it fluttered away beyond reach into the water. Believing that it still floated above his head, he rowed the more lustily for shore, and the Indians, whose number upon the banks continued to increase, failed to do any thing offensive, for it was apparent to them by this time that there was something extraordinary in the whole proceeding.

They had lived along the frontier long enough to understand the meaning of a flag of truce, as well as Captain Jack of the Modocs; but the glimpse they had had of the soiled rag was not such as to make them certain as to the real intentions of the approaching party. The African race is not popular enough among the noble red-men to make them at premium as the bearers of flags of truce, and there was something in the whole thing that gave it such an uncouth and remarkable bearing, that the Indians themselves must have felt a curiosity as great as that of the proverbial New-Englander under similar circumstances.

CHAPTER II.

THE TRAPPER'S WELCOME.

ALL this time, Long Ike, the trapper, was stretched out flat on his face on the cliff with his head so low that he could feel secure against being detected by the vigilant Sioux, even had not their eyes been fastened upon the darkey Cuff.

The telescope, something like a foot in length, projecting slightly over the upper edge of the rock, resembled the muzzle of a gun about to be fired in the direction of the group of Indians, on the other bank; but, the hunter, as may be supposed, was watching the negro with the deepest interest, that grew more and more intense, as he saw him nearing the shore, and what he believed to be his doom.

"An Injin hates a nigger worse nor p'ison, and they'll give him about time to land, and then they'll go fur him, like a dog fur a flea. I feel sorter bad to think I let him go, when I knowed so well what the end on it would be. Hel-loa ! there he is now."

Through the glass, he saw with the greatest distinctness, the prow of the canoe touch the land, instantly followed by the stepping out of Cuff, who could be seen to offer his hand in turn as if they were long-lost brothers to the Sioux gathered around, and then (could Ike believe his eyes ?) he walked backward, apparently on the best of terms with the red-skins.

As may be supposed, the trapper now watched the proceedings, as closely as if his life depended upon the issue. He could see something like a dozen warriors gathered around Cuff, and he supposed they were making ready to inflict some new and fiendish kind of castigation upon the innocent visitor ; but still he remained unharmed, and he could detect no movement that looked like offering him any injury, and still he could not believe it possible that his death would be long deferred, nor that these representatives of the warlike Sioux were likely to undergo any sudden transformation of character.

For fully half an hour, he could see Cuff engaged in conversation with the red-skins, and then he walked backward some distance, behind the camp-fire that was burning brightly ; and, when he disappeared from the view of Long Ike, the latter was certain that he would never look upon his shiny face again.

Who then shall describe his feelings, when a few minutes later the rubicund African strode forth to view, with an Indian a foot taller walking by his side, as though it was the happiest day in the life of each.

Advancing to the water's edge the two stepped in, and the Sioux assumed the paddle, and headed at once toward the shore from which the negro had advanced a short time before. The boat was so directed that it would strike the shore a considerable distance below the cliff upon which he lay stretched, but that did not decrease his amazement in the least. He followed the motions of the canoe with the glass,

until it disappeared among the bushes along the shore, when he cautiously clambered down from his perch, and started toward the spot where the two horses had been left grazing together.

"He said he would come thar and take his animile away, and of course he will, but I don't see what he wants of a hoss, 'cause a critter like him could ride away on his ear, or make a pair of wings and fly. Either one of them things wouldn't be a bigger thing than what he has just did."

Still wondering and speculating over what he had seen, Long Ike made slower progress than he really intended, so that the sun had set, and it was growing dark, when he reached the secluded spot in which he had left his horse grazing beside that of the negro. His own animal was there, and Cuff himself was just riding away.

"Halloa!" he called out, as he saw the trapper. "I've been a-waitin' for yer, till I couldn't wait any longer. What made yer so slow?"

"See yer," said Long Ike, advancing toward the darkey, "you've done what I'd swore no man livin' could do; and I don't understand it yet. I see'd yer go right among them varmints, and I see'd yer come away ag'in, and I want to know what it means, and how yer come to do that 'ere wonderful thing."

"You know what I told yer 'bout Massa Parham, and Miss Rosalie; wal dey hain't been dar at all; dey got away on dar hosses, and I 'spects by dis time, dat dey hab jined de rest ob folks, who will 'gin to worry 'bout me. I'll tell yer all 'bout it some other time—so 'scuse me."

And the impertinent darkey, with his fat face split by a grin that reached almost from ear to ear, waved a happy good-by to the thunderstruck trapper, and rode away out of sight.

"I guess the Sioux have all turned Christians," muttered Long Ike, a few minutes later, as he stood leaning upon his rifle; "that's the only way I kin account for this onaccountable thing—"

Just then his horse raised his head, in a way which showed that some one was approaching, and the hunter quietly slipped back into cover. He had scarcely done so, when the bushes

parted, and a Sioux Indian in his war-paint stepped forth and looked cautiously around. The coast seeming to be clear, he moved with such a soft, cat-like tread toward the horse, that there could be no mistake about his dishonest intention, and Long Ike concluded that it was his duty to "put in his oar."

"I guess not," he said, advancing, rifle in hand, ready to fire. "I don't keer 'bout sellin' any hoss-flesh just now. You kin keep your paws off that critter, if you please."

The Sioux was fairly caught, and instead of showing fight, as the trapper expected him to do, he at once attempted the play of the lamb. Looking steadily at the hunter, for a second, he advanced toward him, with his hand outstretched.

"Good brudder—much glad to see you! how do?"

Long Ike could hardly refuse this unexpected proffer, and he crossed palms with the Sioux devil, all the time gazing on his black, glittering eyes, and knowing very well that he was dealing with the most treacherous creature in the world.

Releasing his grasp, the red-skin stepped back, as though to invite the trapper to mount his own horse.

Long Ike made a movement, as if to do so, and then wheeled as quick as lightning, for he knew it was coming. The Sioux had whipped out his knife, and was in the very act of leaping upon him, when the latter effectually prevented such a move by burying a couple of bullets from his revolver in his skull.

"I don't think them Sioux mean to turn Christians for a few days yet," muttered Long Ike, as he replaced his weapon and mounted his horse.

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS THIEF.

"WELL, Cuff, you must keep close watch onto the varmints, and don't let 'em git ahead of you. Remember that these ain't the same ones that was so kind to yer awhile ago."

"Yes, sah—all right, sah!"

"Some of the skunks have been foolin' round the traps, and you've been braggin' so long that you could git squar' with 'em, if I'd only give you the chance, that I made up my mind to give yer show. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sah, dis chile understands all 'bout it, sah, so you needn't take de trouble to tell me nuffin' more. Cl'ar out, now, and if I don't show yer sumfin', I'll gib up dis bus'ness, and go to practicin' law ag'in in St. Louey."

This snatch of a conversation, as we have given it, was between our old friends Long Ike Wilkins, and Cuff Tompkins, and the time was fully a month after the incidents given in the preceding chapters. The place where they stood was many hundred miles away from the scene of that rather curious adventure of the negro.

Cuff, after parting with the trapper, had gone on to the place appointed for the rendezvous, where he found his friends gathered, with none lost, excepting their guide. They set out at once for Fort Leavenworth, and by sharp riding, and great care and good fortune, they reached their destination in safety. Here it was their intention to remain a month or so, as the party were the guests of the commandant at the fort, who, after the expiration of their visit, was to send them back to the frontier, under charge of a safe escort.

They had been at Fort Leavenworth but a short time, when Long Ike put in an appearance, on his way to the trapping-grounds of the Upper Yellowstone. He rode into the fort early one morning, when all of the party excepting Cuff were absent on a hunt. He seemed to be in a great hurry, and remained scarcely a half-hour; but when he went away, the darkey accompanied him, leaving word for his friends, not to worry themselves over his absence, as he did not expect to be gone over eight or ten years, and he had entered into partnership with the trapper in the fur business.

When the party returned, and found what Cuff had done, they were not a little indignant; but the fellow had become so very independent and saucy since his advent upon the plains, that there was no use of remonstrating with him, and they concluded to give him no further thought.

Long Ike seemed to feel quite a strong attachment for the negro, and since he had seen his remarkable performance

with the Sioux war-party, he regarded him with a sort of superstition, for upon no possible theory could he account for what he had witnessed a month before, when he lay extended upon the cliff, overlooking the river.

Thus far neither party had made any reference to it. The curiosity of the trapper was not sufficient to lead him to ask for an explanation, and Cuff seemed particularly anxious to avoid it. There was certainly some mystery connected with the business, and by a sort of instinctive and mutual consent, it became a tabooed subject between them.

The exigencies of our story demand that we should pass hastily over the incidents that occurred *en route* to the trapping-grounds. It was the intention of Long Ike to spend only a few weeks here, as the season was too far advanced to make it worth his while to remain longer. Accordingly, he settled down and went to work.

All went well for a few days, until he made the discovery that some thieving red-skin was interfering regularly with his work. Rather curiously, it was generally one particular trap that was disturbed. The moccasin foot-prints revealed the character of the thief too clearly to permit any mistake.

Such a proceeding is always sure to excite the fury of the trapper, and Long Ike "went for" that red-skin in dead earnest; but the latter seemed fully as sharp as he, and although the trapper used every art of which he was master to catch his man, he failed. When the watch was too vigilant the Indian kept away from the particular trap that was under surveillance, and paid his respects to one of the others.

But, although he could have played the mischief with all, as well as with one, he never did so.

He left signs every morning of his having "been there, and, as bad or good luck would have it, he never failed to carry away a good prize.

Baffled in this manner, Long Ike undertook to follow his trail, but with no greater success than in the other instances.

The cunning red-skin "took to water," and thus shut off any such plan. From some point down-stream he came in his canoe; but where that point was, and where he was likely

to make his landing next time, the trapper found it impossible to tell.

He lay for hours concealed along the bank, watching and waiting for the canoe that contained the thieving red-skin, swearing that he would never rest until he had "blanket-smoked" him.

He even went miles down-stream, so as to gain the better opportunity—but that opportunity never came, and chagrined and mortified beyond description, he was compelled to give over the attempt, and to wait and trust to good fortune to enable him to square accounts with his enemy in the end.

What made the thing still more annoying all this time was the fact that Cuff declared from the beginning that he could catch the "sarpint" if he were only given the chance.

Long Ike had steadily refused to permit him to make the attempt either by himself or in company with him, convinced that with his little knowledge of the ways of the woods, he would be sure to defeat the purpose.

But at last he gave his consent; and, having made a mutual agreement as to which trap was likely to be disturbed, he accompanied Cuff to it, just at nightfall; carefully set it, and then hunted out a good place near at hand in which he might conceal himself.

This was easily found, and, after stowing the darkey away, he paused long enough to exchange the few words already given, when he left him for the night.

The stream along whose shore Cuff was in hiding, was nothing more in fact than a small creek less than fifty feet in width.

Both shores were lined with heavy trees and undergrowth, and a few hundred yards further up was a beaver-dam that had stood as near as could be judged about a couple of years.

The trap was set at a place where the tiny tracks of the animal were seen in profusion, and where it was almost certain that one of them would be caught before daylight.

A tall, heavy tree grew close to the edge of the water, the branches towering far above the others, while its immense trunk, when struck by the hand, gave a sound that showed it was hollow—nothing but a mere shell, in fact.

Around the base were a number of exuberant sprouts,

that were dense and close enough to hide a person even when the sun was shining at noonday.

But when Cuff crawled in among them and nestled up, he felt that a whole war-party of Sioux might tumble over him, without suspecting his presence.

The moon was at its full on this particular night, and there were very few clouds in the sky, so that on the open plain, or on the prairie, the natural eye would have been able to discern objects for a long distance.

But the towering branches so overhung the creek as to shut out the most of the rays, and to leave the darkness impenetrable in most of the places.

It was only near the middle of the current, that the light was permitted to shine unobstructed, and here the illumination was so clear, that a tiny leaf might have been seen as it floated along.

Cuff, with the assistance of the trapper, had stowed himself away in such a position that he commanded a view of the creek; and, with great confidence that he was about to accomplish what his veteran friend was unable to do, he waited, quite calmly, the coming events of the night.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

AFTER bidding good-by to the negro, Long Ike, the trapper, moved off down the creek, with his rifle slung over his shoulder.

"'Twould be blamed queer," he growled, as he walked along, "if that darkey should pick off that varmint. I don't b'l'ieve thar's much chance, but if he does I'll take off my hat to him."

He walked some distance, thoughtful and meditative, and then broke forth again:

"I never did like darkeys, but thar was something about Cuff that took my fancy at the very first. I s'pose one rea-

son was 'cause he took such a shine to me, and played that smart trick on the Sioux. But there is something 'bout Cuff that I don't understand," he added, with a puzzled expression. "He knows a good deal about Injins, and the more he knows, the less he fears 'em, which ain't apt to be the case with folks. The varmints as a ginerall thing hate the darkeys like p'ison. But they don't hate him, as they showed the first time that I see'd him.

"It gits my time," he continued, in the same perplexed manner. "I never see'd a man, 'specially of his complexion, that the Sioux wouldn't rather shoot than eat thar breakfast."

Ike continued on down the stream, instead of turning off and taking the direction that would lead toward his home among the rocks.

The truth was that he didn't like the idea of Cuff succeeding where he had failed. He meant to prevent it if possible.

This was the reason why he followed the stream down toward the Yellowstone. Although he had failed so often, he still had some hope of success.

When he had gone about three-fourths of a mile, the night settled over the wood and water, and selecting a safe concealment that commanded the stream, he concluded to venture no further away at present.

The trapper reasoned that if the Indian came up the stream, as had been his invariable custom heretofore, it would undoubtedly be from a point lower down than where he had hid himself. This would compel the canoe to pass directly in front of him, under his batteries, as we might say, and give him the chance to pick off his man.

The only trouble about this calculation was that the trapper had tried it several times before, and it had failed in every instance.

There seemed a reasonable assurance, if it proved a fizzle again, that the experience of Cuff further up would be the same—and that was about all that he could hope.

But Long Ike was not to be permitted to remain where he was, there to await the time when his man was to be obliging enough to paddle up in front of him and be shot. He had

spent about an hour in hiding, when he caught a sound, which his trained ear told him at once was an Indian signal. He had traveled enough through the West and North-west to know these sounds the instant he heard them, and he was certain at once that some of the detested race were but a short distance down-stream.

Heard by an ordinary observer, the sounds would have been taken for a peculiar whistle made by a species of bird in this latitude; but the trapper felt satisfied that he was on the eve of gaining some important information. So he rose from his crouching position, and with the stealthy manner that always distinguished his movements at such times, he began picking his way along the bank of the stream, taking care never to permit himself to be out of sight of the current for a few minutes at a time, as he had come to think that, if he should do so, it would just be his perverse luck to let slip the golden opportunity, at that time.

Nearly a mile distant from where he started, the stream was joined by another of a little larger size, and he was certain that it was not far from the junction that the Indians were gathered.

He caught the signal once or twice, while on his way, so that he felt that he was on the right course to gain valuable information.

The trapper's suspicions were confirmed upon hearing, at the very moment of reaching this junction, the same signal as before. It came from the other side of the stream, while the answer sounded but a short distance away, and upon the surface of the water.

"None of 'em on this side," he said, as he caught the sounds; "all are thar, and I'd just as lief go thar as stay here."

He had but to hunt for a short time, when he found his own small canoe stuck away under some bushes, where he had placed it a few days before. The paddle was close beside it, and the next moment Long Ike had taken place in the boat, and was afloat, ready to shoot up or down stream, with the speed almost of the swallow. But he was too cautious a man to start directly for the other shore, when he had received such proof of the Indians being there. He and his boat were in such deep shadow, that he could feel secure from observa

tion, so long as he refrained from venturing out in the moonlight.

Consequently he paddled slowly down-stream, keeping as close to the shore as possible, and listening with that intensity and acuteness that distinguish the Indian scout at such times.

He had gone but a little ways, when he was rewarded by seeing a large canoe upon the stream, a little beyond the middle, making its way against the current, with great speed.

Seated in the canoe were fully a half-dozen warriors, if not more, and it was from one of them that the answer to the signal had come, which had attracted the notice of the trapper.

There was nothing specially noteworthy in this, but when the trapper caught the indistinct glimmer of a camp-fire, through the trees upon the other side, he concluded that he would make a reconnoissance and get more definite information before he went back to his night quarters.

Accordingly he drove his boat down-stream with great speed, until he considered that he had reached a safe point, when he shot over to the other side, carefully hid his boat, and then stole up toward the camp-fire to complete his reconnoissance. This was a kind of business which Long Ike had been in many a time before, and he had little fear but that he could reach the camp and see all that he wished to see without discovery.

His suspicion was that some dozen or twenty Sioux were gathering here for the purpose of making a raid upon him and his possessions, and if such was the case, surely none could have more interest in the issue than he.

The trapper made his way through the wood without difficulty until he came in sight of the camp-fire again, when he governed his proceedings with all the skill and circumspection of which he was master.

As the red-skins were not really under any fear of such a visit, this reconnoissance of the camp was much less difficult than many similar things that he had undertaken.

In one sense, Long Ike made no important discovery, and in another he made a very remarkable one.

In the first place, he saw that there were some eighteen Sioux Indians, nearly one-half of whom were squaws, a couple of whom carried their papposes upon their backs.

The first glance satisfied him that he need have no fear of being disturbed by them, and it was hardly possible that one of the warriors was aware of his being in the neighborhood.

It looked as if they represented two parties that had been in different directions, and that had agreed to rendezvous here—the signals that the trapper had heard, being merely to guide each other to the appointed spot.

All this being so, there would have been nothing of special interest in the company of Sioux, but for the fact that they had a prisoner with them—a young, lovely white girl, who was well dressed, and who seemed in the very depths of despair.

She was sitting upon a fallen tree, near the fire, with her head leaning upon her hand, apparently unconscious of what was going on around her. To say that the trapper was surprised at the sight would but feebly express his emotions. Had he seen this captive several hundred miles further south, in the neighborhood of the settlements, it would have been nothing more than he expected to see among the blood-thirsty Sioux.

But he was far up in the North-west, among the mountain solitudes, where, as yet, no female of his race ever thought of penetrating, and it was strange that this young lady should be here a prisoner among her enemies.

True, it would seem that she might have been brought here by some marauding party that had been devastating Minnesota, but several facts forbade such a reasonable conclusion.

In the first place, Long Ike knew that nothing was more improbable than that these Indians had been so far away from the present spot during the months past.

Their dress and their appearance showed that they belonged to the mountain Sioux—the bravest and most dangerous of their tribe. They were the deadly enemies of the hunters and trappers who penetrated these solitudes, and they contented themselves with hunting and warring against all who came within their reach, without taking the pains of going a long distance to hunt them out.

Besides which the appearance of the girl herself showed that she had been a prisoner but a short time. Her dress was

civilized in every respect, even to the hat she wore upon her head.

And then her extreme dejection and despair indicated that she was in the overwhelming anguish of one of her sex when she first finds herself helpless in the hands of her abhorred foes.

The conclusion of the whole matter was that there was a mystery, beside the common dictates of humanity calling upon the trapper to do the best he could to befriend the poor girl—and Long Ike compressed his lips and resolved that he would do so to the full extent of his power.

CHAPTER V.

CUFF'S PRIZE.

"LONG IKE t'inks dat dis darkey dunno nuffin' 'bout Injins, and mebbe he don't, and den mebbe ag'in dat he does, and mebbe, too, dat he will change his opinion in de mornin', when I fotch him dis yer sarpint on my back, and make him promise to bring back all de beavers wot he has stole."

Thus thought the negro, Cuff, when he was left alone on the shore of the creek to wait and watch for the Indian that had paid such mysterious thieving visits to their traps, and that had so cunningly eluded every attempt to detect him.

"De folks t'ought dat I didn't know nuffin', when we started from St. Louey, but dey found out dat if I didn't I soon did l'arn.

"Long Ike often wonders why it am dat I ain't more afear'd ob de Injins dan I am," added the darkey, with a chuckle; "but he don't 'pect de secret dat I carries wid me, and dat has saved my life more nor once. Golly! but it's a lucky t'ing dat I hab dat secret! If de trapper had it, he wouldn't hab to use his knife and rifle so much to git out ob a rumpus. When we leab dese parts and git down among de settlements ag'in, I guess I'll hab to tell him. I'd tell him now," he said, speaking more quickly, as if he was explaining

the matter to some friend at his elbow, "but it couldn't do him no good, unless we should happen to bofe fall into de hands ob de sarpints at de same time, and den it wouldn't make no difference to him, whedder I tole him how it was or not, so I guess I'll keep mum fur de present."

Any one everhearing the muttering of the negro, might well wonder what all this meant, referred to in such mysterious terms. He seemed indeed afraid to tell himself, if such a paradox is permissible.

That he was quite proud and delighted, and that he was certain he possessed a most valuable secret (and we may as well say that such was the fact) was very evident from his manner.

"Dat yer same secret hab gub 'ee a good deal ob fun," he added, in the same odd, stealthy manner, "and dar's no mistake dat it hab fatched me 't ob some ob de nastiest scrapes dat any chicken eber gott himself inter. I dunno if it warn't fur dat, dat I'd be struchin' 'long de shore ob dis little rivulet, at de risk ob catchin' cold, and wid no way to get a bottle ob Mrs. Winslow's soothin' syrup to help me out. Bress de Lord dat he war so kind to gib me dat secret."

And having delivered himself of this fervent expression of gratitude, he came to the conclusion that it was about time he ended his commings, and addressed himself to the serious business before him.

The hunter may school himself to wait patiently hour after hour in a certain position for the occurrence of an expected event; but this waiting business was the hardest thing that Cuff found connected with the life that otherwise had so many attractions to him.

But, being desirous of getting ahead of Long Ike, he roused himself to special effort in this case, and he determined to hang on until morning, so that, if there should be another failure, they could not hold him responsible for it.

Cuff stood it very well for two or three hours, but by the end of that time it began to grow irksome.

"Wish dat ar' chap would come," he grumbled, with a yawn. "Ike sw'ared dat he couldn't know dat I war hid-a-lyer, and I 'spose he tinks he orter know, and so he ort,

but dat ain't any sign dat he does. But den I don't believe dat anybody knows dat I am here. Hach !"

Cuff pricked up his ears on the instant, for he was sure at that moment that he caught the sound of something suspicious.

It was so faint and slight that it was hard for him to tell where it was, or to form much idea of its character; but he believed it was on the creek, and very close at hand.

Of course Cuff was all agitation, certain that the copper-colored thief was at hand, and that the good fortune that had been so long denied the old trapper was about to descend to him.

But minute after minute passed away, and he heard nothing more. When his impatience became so great, he rose to his feet, until his head projected above the bushes that enveloped his body, and carefully scanned the stream.

There was the little creek, with the center plainly visible as it flowed along in the moonlight, and with the other shore dark and gloomy.

But nothing could be seen upon which he could hang a suspicion, and he listened long, but in vain, for the repetition of that slight sound, or for one that was more definite, and that would give him some clearer idea of what caused it.

"Guess it war de Injin," growled the darkey; "he must hab come so nigh dat he smelled me and hab gone back ag'in."

This was a great disappointment to Cuff, but, as the night was no more than half gone, he determined to sit it out until morning. He had scarcely formed this resolve, when his heart gave another violent throb, as he caught the same sound.

This time it seemed so close and its location was so well defined, that he stealthily raised his head and peered out upon the stream.

There, sure enough, directly in the middle, it was to be seen! A small, beautifully-formed Indian canoe was there, seemingly not moving at all, but held stationary by something or some one.

This looked like business, except for the fact that there was no one within the little boat, and it seemed to have drifted there from some point above.

Where was the Indian thief?

This was the question Cuff asked himself, for he could not doubt for a moment that it was he who owned the vessel.

This was a puzzling question, and the first answer that the negro was disposed to give, was that he had landed and was approaching the trap.

This suspicion was confirmed by a slight noise that he heard in that direction.

"Injin is dar, and now he'll l'arn sumfin' dat he nebber knowed afore."

Confident that he had him sure, Cuff grasped his rifle and stole out from the dense undergrowth by which he was enveloped.

This was one of the most delicate and difficult duties that the Indian-fighter is called upon to undertake—that of stealing unsuspected upon a watchful and suspicious foe.

If it was really the Indian, then he had every reason to believe that he was waited and watched for, and consequently he would be unusually cautious in approaching the danger and unusually vigilant in guarding against the approach of an enemy.

But Cuff considered himself equal to the crisis, and he made his way forward with a care and stealth and skill that would have done credit to Long Ike himself.

He was within about a dozen feet of the trap, when he heard distinctly something moving near it, and raising the hammer of his rifle he also raised himself to his feet, and peered out in the gloom, confident in catching sight of his victim.

"Yes; there he was!"

Straining his eyes to the utmost, he could make out a dim, shadowy figure, close to the trap, that at first seemed motionless, but which he perceived was advancing very slowly toward it.

"I've got you," called out Cuff in a suppressed and anxious but what he meant should be a determined voice. "You're cotted at last, and now you've got to fotch back all dem skins dat you stol'd, and to come round to de house and ax pardon of Long Ike for offending him—helloa!"

There is no telling how much longer this harangue would have lasted, had it not been interrupted by the discovery that

the one to whom he was addressing his words was not disposed to remain and listen to them.

"Stop dat!" commanded Cuff, sternly; "I see what you're up to, and if you don't stop right squar', I'll pepper you."

But the result of this peremptory command was to send the one to whom it was addressed going off faster than ever.

He headed toward the stream, and seeing that nothing else remained to do, Cuff took a quick aim with the upraised rifle and fired.

A piercing scream rung out upon the still night air, and the negro saw his victim struggling upon the ground in his death-agonies.

Poor Cuff was so horror-struck at the sights and sounds, that a sudden revulsion came upon him, and he drew back, unable to advance and claim his victim.

"Sorry dat I killed him," he muttered, as he drew back, out of sight of the dark, writhing body upon the ground, "but why didn't he surrender when I told him to? I gib him plenty ob time, and he didn't hab no right to come 'bout hyar and steal our peltries."

This was the logic by which Cuff tried to convince himself that he had only done his simple duty in shooting the red-skin.

He knew, too, that the latter would not have hesitated to pick him off, had their mutual positions been reversed.

But all this undoubtedly was true, but it could not lessen the horror he felt at the sounds and struggles of his victim so near at hand.

He placed his hands to his ears, but he could not shut out the dreadful sounds.

He was on the point of turning round and rushing away, beyond hearing, when the cries suddenly ceased.

"Poor feller! he's dead!" said Cuff, with a sinking heart. "I'll go and put him on my shoulder, and fotch him ober to de house, and Ike and me will give him a decent burial. I s'pose we kin git a good tombstone down at de fort, and arter we find out his name, put it onto it, and tell his relations."

With this laudable purpose, he made his way carefully forward to where the dead body lay.

But when he reached it and stooped over to lift it up, behold it was a dead beaver!

CHAPTER VI.

RIDING IN A BEWITCHED CANOE.

WHEN Cuff found that, instead of picking up a defunct Indian, he had only caught hold of a beaver, it would be hard to say whether he was more surprised than disgusted.

He stood for several minutes unable to express his amazement, and then he withdrew to consider the question.

"Dat ar's a purty state ob t'ings, blamed ef it ain't. I'm kinder glad it ain't an Injun; but won't Long Ike laugh when he finds out how I was fooled? Howsumdever, dis business ain't frugh yet."

He knew that it had been proven long since that a red-skin was at the bottom of all the mischief, and he was the "oyster he wanted to open."

But the experience of Cuff among the Indians of the West told him that it was not reasonable to expect a visit from this particular thief after what had happened.

The firing of the gun, and the outcries of the wounded beaver, must have reached the ears of all who were within a radius of half a mile.

But the canoe!

As the darkey recalled that that was but a short distance away, he determined to give it his exclusive attention.

Unless it had been spirited away, it could not have floated far; and Cuff had picked his way but a short distance along the edge of the stream, when he caught sight of it.

It was near the middle of the stream, which flowed so slowly that the motion of the boat was scarcely perceptible.

It was Cuff's wish to secure possession of the little boat, but it was so far out that he was puzzled how to do so, with

out stepping in the water—a thing which he was very anxious to avoid.

But the means speedily suggested itself when he saw a large tree, which sloped over the creek, sending out several large limbs, some of which extended nearly across to the other side.

“Golly-nation! dat’s de ticket!” exclaimed Cuff, as he hurried down to catch the piece; “dat’ll fix t’ings lubly.”

For convenience, he left his gun upon the shore, and drawing himself up among the bushes, began crawling out upon the lowermost branch, which reached over the water. This was heavy and strong, so that there was no danger of its breaking, but it yielded just enough to bring him about as near the water as he wished to be.

It was still some twenty feet further up-stream, but drifting steadily toward him, and, as near as he could judge, would pass directly beneath where he was waiting.

Cuff was rendered a little uneasy by the suspicion that perhaps there might be some one within the boat, in which case, with his gun beyond his reach, he was not in precisely the position he could desire.

Accordingly, it may well be supposed that he carefully scanned the approaching canoe, as the moonlight permitted, and he was greatly relieved when he discovered that it was empty.

“Hyar you come, me own beauty,” he growled, with a huge grin of delight, as he reached down his brawny arm to seize it.

When he caught the gunwale, he saw that the paddle lay within, and he concluded that he would let himself down into it, paddle ashore and get his gun, and then the boat itself would be quite a prize, if he should gain nothing more.

To let himself down from his perch, even though he was but a short distance above, was a delicate task, but Cuff felt himself equal to it.

“Easy ’nough to do dem t’ings when a feller knows how. I’ve found out how to manage t’ings wid de red-skins, oder people can not, and so I ’spose dar ain’t many dat could git off ob a limb ob a tree into an Injin canoe. Dem folks oughter be here to see me do it, and l’arn how—”

Cuff probably would have continued his conceited observations to himself but for the fact that at that moment, when he was letting himself down from his perch, and came to bear his weight upon the canoe, the latter turned over, as quick as a flash, and he went head-foremost under the water, never stopping in his descent until his head bumped against the clayey bottom.

Cuff knew how to swim very well, but he needed not the knowledge, as he struck the ground with such force that the recoil quickly brought him to the surface, and he found the canoe within arm's-length.

"Golly-nation! but it's lucky dat dem folks warn't hare to see me make dat summerset into de water," he growled, as he seized the paddle, that was floating off, and swam toward the shore, pushing the boat before him.

Here he picked up his gun, and placing it in the little boat, he stowed himself alongside of it, and then concluded that, barring his wet garments, he was as well off as he could expect to be.

"Dey'll git dry arter awhile," he said to himself, "and den de night's so warm dat it ain't likely dat I'll catch cold."

It would have been hard for the darkey to have explained, even to himself, what his precise purpose was in entering the boat at this time. Common prudence, it would seem, would suggest that he should have drawn it to land, and still kept himself on the look-out for the owner.

But, with the purpose of paddling down-stream, he laid his rifle in the bottom of the canoe, and picking up the paddle dipped it into the water.

In this particular branch of the hunter's profession, Cuff was not as much experienced as he was in the others, but it did not seem to him that he needed any great amount of experience to accomplish all that he desired.

But a strange occurrence now marked his efforts in this line.

At the first essay, the light vessel moved gracefully forward several feet, and then paused so abruptly that the negro came very near tipping overboard again.

"What de blazes am de matter wid dat? he muttered, angrily. "What's de use ob fotchin' up in dat style; acts

just as if it went by jumps, and den stopped long enough to git ready to make anoder jump."

After pausing a moment, Cuff tried it again, and this time the boat behaved in a much better manner, that is at the beginning of the trip, but it was not long before the thing got into the tantrums again.

After he had paddled out into the middle of the stream he decided to keep on down the current.

"It's easier to row wid de current dan ag'in' it," he remarked to himself, with the manner of one who was making known some great discovery, "so I t'inks dat I'll take a trip down-stream, and if it's too hard to paddle back ag'in, I'll pick up de boat and carry it ober land home, or let it alone."

But behold! Although he gave the paddle the motion, and the canoe the impulse, that ought to have carried him at quite a rapid rate down the stream, yet the boat not only refused to obey, but it actually went in the other direction!

Poor Cuff stopped paddling, and stared around him in open-mouthed amazement. His first impulse was to jump out of the boat, with a yell of terror, and run for home as fast as his legs could carry him; but, the thought of what fun Long Ike would have at his expense, gave him a courage to which he was a stranger at other times, and he determined to see the end of this rather strange adventure.

As the boat took the wrong turn, he labored might and main in the opposite direction, in the hope of overcoming the mysterious agency.

But in spite of all this outlay of strength and skill the vessel continued to make its stubborn progress the wrong way.

True, it moved very slowly, just as it was moving when he first caught sight of it, but it was none the less decided for all that.

Finally Cuff felt so exhausted that he gave over his efforts and took a breathing-spell.

"I guess the debil has got me!" he exclaimed, with a great sigh, "but I don't see what he wants to take me up dat way fur."

But Cuff was not such an idiot as to suppose that there might not be human agency also at work in this business, and

his exclamation was intended for the ears of any one who might be near enough to hear him, and with full intent to deceive and mislead.

At the same time, as he folded his arms and leaned back, he not only looked and listened, but he relied somewhat on his sense of feeling to get at the explanation of these strange proceedings.

He could feel the canoe moving, but he noticed that the motion was growing less and less perceptible, until in a few minutes it ceased altogether.

Remaining stationary but a brief spell, it again came under the influence of the current, and drifted along, as it was floating when he first caught sight of it.

This looked as if whatever had held the boat under its control was gradually relinquishing it, and the darkey sat still and listening, waiting for some slight jar or ripple to give him the clue.

Neither of these coming, he leaned his head forward, and looked over each side of the canoe in turn, and then over the bow and then the stern.

But listening and looking failed to tell him any thing, and he began to believe that after all there must be something supernatural at the bottom of the whole business.

"I b'l'ever dat the canoe am bewitched," he growled, in dead earnest to himself—" 'cause dar ain't nobody dat eber heard tell ob any thing cuttin' up like dat."

Still, for all this, he was resolved not to yield his place in the boat for the present. Having come to the conclusion that there was no need of his expecting to find the Indian thief by waiting and watching alone, and being loth to return to their sleeping-quarters without carrying some more tangible proof of his shrewdness and bravery to long Ike, he sat back again in the rear of the canoe, folded his arms, and waited to see what was to be the end of this strange night business.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BLACK SPIRIT.

THE canoe in which the darkey was seated continued floating down-stream, without showing any of those whimsicalities which marked its conduct when Cuff undertook to control it at first.

Thinking that it might be that the mysterious agent was only waiting for some move upon his part, the negro lifted the paddle and dipped it softly in the water, gradually increasing the vigor with which he plied it, until he had attained no inconsiderable speed.

But nothing unusual, or in the slightest degree out of place caught his attention, and once more he ceased all labor, placed the paddle beside his rifle in the bottom of the boat, and then cuddled down like a kitten to await the issue.

The night was now far advanced, it being considerably beyond the turn, and, after sitting for several minutes in the boat, gliding smoothly along and waiting for that which did not occur, a drowsiness began stealing over the darkey.

Finding his position somewhat irksome, he sunk further down in the canoe, until he was stretched out at full length, with his body below the upper edge of the boat so that he was invisible to any one upon the banks, unless the observer was so elevated that he could look down upon him.

As might be supposed, Cuff had not occupied this posture fifteen minutes when he sunk into a heavy, deep slumber, all forgetful that he was sailing down the stream in a bewitched canoe toward some unknown point.

When Cuff felt sleepy, he was pretty sure to sleep, unless the circumstances were peculiarly lively about him.

Floating downward in this manner, the boat continued onward toward the junction, where it will be remembered, Long Ike the trapper had stationed himself for the purpose of watching for the Indian thief.

Had he still been there when the canoe drifted by, its depth in the water would have told him that it contained some occupant, and never dreaming that it could be his own friend, he would have sent the bullet from his rifle through bark and body, and made the sleep of Cuff his long, last, eternal one.

But, it will be recalled that the trapper had left the spot hours before, and was engaged in a different series of incidents, to which we must speedily give our attention.

So this danger was happily averted.

Onward the canoe drifted, and still it seemed to attract the notice of no one—neither friend or foe.

But this immunity did not continue long, for it was yet a considerable distance from the junction where the Indians were encamped, when a boat almost precisely similar shot out from the dense shadows along shore, and headed directly toward it.

In this canoe was seated a single Indian, of small size, but remarkable agility, who plied his paddle with the skill and velocity of a steam-engine.

As he came alongside the other canoe, he shied his boat around, so as to place it very near, without the possibility of striking it, and then he looked over.

There lay the African, sound asleep and snoring like a Flander. Indeed, the Indian heard the sound of his breathing while yet a goodly distance off.

No man could have wished to find his enemy at greater disadvantage. There he lay we say—flat upon his back, with his face upturned, his breast offering a tempting subject for the knife, and he sunk in heavy slumber.

Could the bloody Sioux wish any better chance to smite his foe?

The dark face seemed to light up in the moonlight, with the basest exultant passion, and laying down the paddle, he reached out his left hand, and seizing the gunwale of the other boat, he gently drew them together.

Still Cuff slept, not dreaming of danger.

With his right hand the Indian drew his knife from his girdle, and then leaning his body and shoulder forward, he was directly over the form of his enemy.

And still the latter breathed as heavily and was as unconscious of his impending doom, as if in his own bed in his distant home.

The Indian cared not if he did awake now, for it would avail him nothing.

One swift downward plunge of that uplifted knife, and the dreadful deed would be consummated. Cuff would be dead with hardly time to know what had slain him.

But why did he hesitate, and why was the arm stayed?

In spite of the jet-black complexion of Cuff, the Indian seemed not to have noticed it particularly until he was about to strike.

He could not avoid knowing that this was his color at the very first glance, but when he came to look more closely, he discovered something that caused amazement, and what looked very much like fear upon his part.

The uplifted knife was lowered, and he still gazed more closely, until his coppery face was but a few inches from that of the African.

The view seemed to result as he feared.

"Woogh!" he exclaimed, with a shudder of terror; "he bad spirit!—he look at red-man!—red-man die!"

And catching up his paddle, he rowed like a warrior who was pursued by a dozen mortal enemies panting for his life.

The frail vessel sped like a swallow over the water, the terror of the occupant causing him to continue the speed until it shot into the bushes, and glided up on the shore like the arrow driven from the bow.

And then the Indian leaped out and hurried away, as if he still considered his life in danger so long as he was within call or sight of the negro.

What was the cause of this terror upon the part of the red-skin? What was it that had stayed the uplifted arm, and changed the conqueror into the vanquished? What spell was it that Cuff possessed which, even in his sleep, drove away his enemies, and saved him from injury? What was it that caused the Sioux to call him a bad spirit? How and by what means had Cuff gained a reputation that was known to him, as it must have been known to many other warriors besides?

This action on the part of the Sioux warrior was a confirmation of the boast the African had made to himself, that he carried with him a mysterious secret, a strange power that gave him an extraordinary command over the treacherous Indian.

Such was the fact, indeed, and the jolly, good-natured Cuff had the shrewdness to keep it concealed when there was no necessity of making it known.

The friends who had accompanied him to Fort Leavenworth knew what it was, but they made no reference to it in the presence of others.

We have shown that Long Ike the trapper suspected its existence, and it sometimes caused a sort of awe upon his part, for it was beyond his comprehension that one of his despised race should possess a power which he, a veteran hunter of a quarter of century's experience, could not secure.

Many a time he racked his brain to form some conjecture of its nature, but all in vain, and he refrained from making any reference to it, although he was on the point, more than once, of doing so.

But the secret was there, and had a tangible existence, and we promise our readers that it shall be made clear before the end of our story is reached.

The canoe in which Cuff lay asleep continued gliding downstream, until it reached the junction of the creeks to which we have made reference. Long Ike at this time was concealed in the woods, engaged in reconnoitering the camp-fire, and doing his best to decide upon some means of befriending the hapless girl, who seemed to have no friend near her except the great One above, who never loses sight of the humbles of his creatures.

But the boat, floating so smoothly and quietly along, did not pass the Indian camp-fire unobserved.

Two warriors were standing on the shore, discussing some matter in their own tongue, when both simultaneously caught sight of the object, and springing into their own boat, they hurriedly paddled out, with a purpose of intercepting it.

They knew, too, before reaching it, that it contained something or some one, and so they were prepared, in a cer-

tain sense, for the discovery of a sleeping figure at the bottom.

The complexion of the occupant caused them considerable surprise, although it failed to excite the wonder and fear that it did in the breast of the single Indian further up stream.

Instead of leaving the boat to drift onward, one of them caught hold of the prisoner with his hand, while the other used the paddle with such vigor, that in a few seconds both were resting against the land.

As their purpose was to take the negro prisoner instead of killing him, it became necessary now to awake him.

But this was a task which it seemed was impossible of accomplishment. To the Indians, who are instantly awakened from a sound sleep by the slightest disturbance, it was a source of surprise that their prisoner was not aroused by the change in the direction of his boat and the noise made by the rippling of their long-bladed oar.

But this surprise became blank amazement, when one of them reached over, and speaking rather sharply in his ear, found that his dreams still remained uninterrupted.

This was repeated several times, and one becoming impatient caught his shoulder and gave him a thumping shake, repeating it again and again.

Cuff snored just the same as when stretched at full length in the boat.

This was too much, and speaking together a few moments, the two picked up the canoe, lifted it clear of the water, and turned it completely over, causing the occupant to fall out flat upon his face.

But the negro lay still just as he fell, breathing as regularly and sonorously as he ever did in his life. When he went to sleep, he meant business, and wasn't going to let such little things as these disturb him.

The Indians might have concluded him dead, but for the stunning evidence he gave of lusty life. But he was dead, so far as the present circumstances were concerned, and despairing of rousing him from his somnolence, one of the warriors took him by his heels, and the other by the head, and started to carry him to camp, which was but a short distance away.

CHAPTER VIII.

CUFF'S STRATEGY.

SOME persons are peculiarly gifted in the way of slumber, and Cuff was one of these. As the two Indians lifted him from the ground, he showed no more signs of returning sensibility than he did under the previous efforts to awake him.

But they themselves found that they had not undertaken the easiest task in the world, for he proved to be unusually limp and extraordinarily heavy.

The feet lifted readily enough, and so did the head and shoulders; but the other part of the body remained upon the ground. In fact it was like trying to lift a heavy piece of timber that had a joint in the middle. Instead of lifting, the joint merely moved, like the hinge of a door.

Clearly this mode was a failure, and then they tried to remedy matters by pulling the negro out straight, so as to get him off the ground.

This partially succeeded, although Cuff still remained curved up in a very awkward posture; but when they undertook to walk, his body sagged down again, and they found that instead of carrying they were dragging him over the ground.

But they cared nothing for this, so long as they got him along in some way, and they were proceeding to locomote in this manner, when Cuff's large feet suddenly straightened out with sudden power and force.

Both feet took the Indian directly in the stomach, and sent him tumbling backward with the breath knocked out of his body.

As he lay groaning and writhing in his pain, the other warrior let go of the head and did a very unusual thing for one of his race to do.

He stepped back and laughed heartily at his companion, who was fairly faint with the shock he had received.

And directly between the two, lay Cuff, still sweetly dreaming of the scenes of his childhood.

But the blow that the red-skin had received was not calculated to put him in the best of humor; and, as soon as he had recovered his wind, his face assumed a deadly expression of ferocity, and drawing his knife, he went for the sleeper with a savageness that showed too plainly his terrible intention.

But the other Sioux interfered, and stepped between the furious warrior and his intended victim.

"He is asleep," he said, in his own tongue; "he knows not what he does. Wait till he wakes, and then fight him."

"But he will never awake," was the reasonable reply of the other.

"Wait and we will make him open his eyes, when he comes to his senses, and then he can give you battle for what you have done."

It required considerable protestation and argument before the injured red-skin would consent to forego his pleasure of killing the darkey who had caused him so much suffering, and he would only consent to resume the carrying of their victim by a change of place with his comrade.

Having once received a broadside from those huge shoots, which looked like pontoons, he had no purpose of incurring the risk again.

Accordingly they grasped Cuff once more, and began tugging and toiling at him as before, part of the time lifting him clear of the ground, but more frequently dragging the greater part of his body.

They had given up all hope of waking him up by their unaided efforts, and so they concluded to throw the responsibility upon the whole company, half suspecting that they would all together prove unequal to the task.

Half carrying and half dragging him in this manner, the camp-fire was reached in the course of a few minutes.

Here Cuff was deposited full length upon the ground, before the astonished company, while his exhausted captors explained how it was that they had found him, and the curious difficulty they had in bringing him to his senses.

About this time, Cuff ended his extraordinary sleep. He

was still lying flat upon the ground, when he gave a yawn, stretched out his limbs and opened his eyes.

For one moment he stared about him, as if unable to comprehend where he was. And well might he wonder, for what a contrast between his going to sleep and his awaking!

He looked in the faces of the Indians that were gathered about, from one to the other, and at last exclaimed, as he scratched his head in perplexity:

"Golly-nation! I know dat when I went to bed you didn't go to sleep wid me, and I'd like to know how you come to crawl in wid me. I t'ink dat must hab been a purty good-sized couch to let all you chaps in—"

At this juncture, his eyes rested upon the girl sitting in the tree near him. He had not noticed her before, and his surprise, if possible, became greater than ever, at finding her in such company. The second glance showed him that it was no less a person than his old friend Rosalie Blackwood, but he deemed it best, just then, to act the part of a stranger toward her.

"I'll be 'bliged to you," said he, as he rose to his feet, and respectfully saluted her, "if you'll tell me whar I is. I hain't got much 'quaintance wid dese yer folks, and dar don't seem to be nobody dat'll 'dooce you to me."

Taking the cue from his words and manner, she stared wonderingly at him for a moment, and then answered:

"Persons in our unfortunate position scarcely need an introduction to each other."

"Dese folks ain't any relations ob yours I s'pose," he continued, in his half humorous and half-earnest way. "I mean dat dey ain't any friends, and dat you wouldn't be har if you could help it."

"No, indeed," she said, as her dark eyes seemed to flash fire. "If I had my way, I'd have every one of these wretches sunk a thousand feet deep in the sea."

"I'm with you dar," he said, emphatically; taking a step nearer her, and showing by his manner that he was particularly pleased with her reply. "I don't blebe you could put them to any better use nor dat. Hain't yer got any friends about, dat is I mean beside me, dat didn't git lost wid you?"

"Yes," she replied, and seemed on the point of adding

something more in way of explanation, when she cast a fearful, apprehensive glance around, and said, in a lower voice: "I see they are watching and listening, and it will not do to say more that they may hear."

"You kin tell me in a way dat dey needn't know what you mean," said Cuff. "Dat is, you kin tell me jest de opposite, and den dey'll nebber know when you're tellin' ob de truf, and when you ain't."

It can not be said that this talk was very interesting, or that there was much point to it, nor did the interlocutor carry it on in a way calculated to gain much information from the young lady.

But there was a design in all this apparent foolishness of the darkey, and had any one watched him closely while thus engaged, it would have been seen that he was in reality paying more attention to the Indians than he was to the young lady.

The former, including the squaws, were gathered in an irregular circle, silent and watchful, apparently greatly interested in the actions of their new prisoners, and endeavoring to understand what was passing between them.

They could well afford to indulge in some such trifling as this, when they had the two so safely in their power, without any probable chance of their getting away.

Cuff was trying to find out whether he had ever seen any of these Sioux before, and whether any of them suspected his identity. He was in hope that they knew who he was, or had heard of him in some way, in which case he felt he might dismiss all concern regarding his ultimate fate at the hands of these Indians.

It may seem strange that a negro, falling into the hands of a party of hostile Sioux, should thus calmly consider the chances, and deliberately come to the conclusion that he had little or no cause to fear for his safety.

But such was the case, so far as he was personally concerned. His only anxiety was now concerning his old friend Rosalie Blackwood.

Well aware of the value these Indians placed upon such captives as her, he knew that it would be no trifling task to get her out of their hands. Whatever the secret power

might be that he possessed, there was no doubt that he would soon be called upon to use it to the furthest extent possible.

In casting furtive glances around in the manner we have mentioned, Cuff could not make certain that he saw any one who gave evidence that they suspected his identity.

Considering his color—such an unusual one in these latitudes—it ought to have produced an effect that would have been discernible at once, if so be that he was known to any of them.

Cuff noticed two large warriors standing a little apart from the others, that seemed to be conversing together while they kept their eyes upon him.

It might be that they were not entire strangers to him, although he found it impossible to recall their faces in the stolen looks he cast toward them.

But recognition upon his part would have been very difficult, in case he had seen them very recently, for there was such a similarity in the color, dress and general appearance of all these people, that he might well confess himself puzzled to tell one from the other.

"I t'inks dem roosters know me," concluded Cuff, after he had bestowed several more glances upon them; "dey're tryin' to find out whedder dey do or not, and I guess it's time dat I l'arned fur my own pussonal convenience."

With which he proceeded to settle the question, which was such a doubtful one to him.

CHAPTER IX.

ROSALIE'S STORY.

THE plan which Cuff had determined upon to settle the matter in his own mind was a very simple one indeed.

He suddenly ceased his talk with Rosalie, and turning his head, looking steadily and intently at the two warriors for full a minute.

When they found his eyes fixed upon them, they suddenly

ceased talking, and showed by their manner that they felt very ill at ease.

Waiting until they felt almost as uncomfortable as possible, Cuff made them a very elaborate salute, and called out in quite a loud voice:

"How do you do? I'se glad to see ye. I hope dat de folks at home are all well."

Upon hearing them addressed in this manner, the eyes of all the others were at once turned toward the warriors, as if those standing around were desirous of understanding what this singular course of conduct meant.

This increased the confusion of the two warriors still more, and they behaved like a couple of awkward schoolboys—showing such palpable confusion that they withdrew finally beyond the radius of the light thrown out by the fire, retiring into the darkness of the woods.

All this satisfied Cuff that these *two Indians, at least, had seen him before, and knew who he was.*

"Dat's wery lucky," he concluded. "Dat'll make dis business ob mine a blamed sight more easy dan I t'inked it was."

He then turned again to Rosalie, and said in a more serious voice than he had as yet assumed:

"Don't gib up; t'ings may look wery dark to you, but I t'ink dat is 'cause you look at me so much, but dar's a way out, dat I'll show you afore you're much older. Keep a stiff upper lip—dat's all."

The expression of Rosalie's face, as she turned toward the negro, plainly implied that she knew what he meant, but put no faith in it. Cuff read the look of incredulity, and said, with a meaning shake of his head:

"You, no doubt, t'ink dat I'm talkin' wild, but you won't t'ink so by to-morrow night by dis time. I'll show you some t'ings dat'll make you open your purty eyes wider dan you opened dem afore."

"I am sure that any one would think you were out of your head, Cuff, to hear you speak as you do. I am a hapless prisoner, with no human friend near to help me in my trouble. I have no doubt that you would be glad to aid me, if you had the power; but you are in precisely the same position that I am, and yet on the face of that, you would have

me believe that you have some means at your command of assisting me in my distress. I surely would be as foolish as you did I credit it, knowing as I do to what secret you refer."

"All right," responded Cuff, with a shake of his head. "I don't blame ye for t'inkin' all dat, but wait and see, and hereby you'll ax my pardon."

Poor Rosalie was more certain than ever that Cuff was crazy; and she only wondered that the Sioux warriors stood around and permitted the farce to go on.

But impelled by a sort of sympathy for him, in his affliction, she truthfully and readily answered the questions he put to her.

"How long have you been a prisoner among dese oysters?"

"A little more than two days."

"How was it that they came to capture you?"

"I was out riding with an escort, and a dozen others, when he and I engaged in a race of our steeds. The race led us out of sight of the others, and by and by he allowed me to get so far ahead of him, that I turned about to rejoin him. As I did so, I saw him on the top of a hill a half a mile distant, making some signals to me, which I did not understand. I reined up my horse, and was trying to make out what he meant, when a party of Indians suddenly appeared directly between us, about midway from our respective stations.

"George had seen them before I did," continued Rosalie, growing quite excited, as she recalled the thrilling scene, "and finding he could not get to me, had done his best to give me warning, that I might flee."

"And why didn't you flee?" asked Cuff.

"I did," she answered; "I saw that to try and reach George, would only be to run right among the Indians, and so I turned my horse's head away and gave him free rein. He was a fleet animal, and he seemed to speed away with the swiftness of the wind."

"Was it de prairie dat you was riding ober? I s'pose it was, fur dat's whar I left yer."

"Had it been level prairie, they never would have caught me," replied Rosalie, closing her lips while her dark eyes flashed with anger, "but these people do everything by treach-

ery. The ground was broken, hill after hill rising before me, so that only at intervals could I obtain a view of half a mile, and oftentimes it was only for a few hundred yards.

"I kept up my flight for a half an hour, my horse all the time on a dead run, and then when I reached the top of another swell of land I reined him up, to see where my pursuers were.

"Not one was in sight—nor was any living person; I felt as if I was in a solitary world with no friend within a thousand miles.

"And then such a desire came over me to return to my friends, that it seemed as if I should go wild if I could not speedily reach them.

"But I dared not turn back, for fear of meeting the Indians, whom I dreaded more than a pack of a thousand fierce wolves.

"I sat for quite a time trying to decide what was best for me to do. At last I concluded to ride over the ridge, and take a direction at right-angles to that which I had been following, and after going as far as it seemed necessary to get out of the reach of the Sioux, I could then make another change, and in the end get back to them.

"Gollynation! but dat was de true course," put in Cuff, who was so absorbed in the story of Rosalie, that he forgot the presence of the Indians, whose demeanor showed that they were scarcely less interested than he.

"So it seemed to me," continued the girl, "and it ought to have succeeded, and it would have succeeded too if I had been pursued by civilized or half-civilized creatures.

"When I had gone a couple of miles, I rode up the hill again to see whether it was safe for me to make the last change in the route I had been following.

"My horse had had a good run, and I had let him walk during this part of the trip, for he was covered with foam and he needed the rest badly.

"Well, when I reached the crest of the hill and looked all around the horizon, still I could see nothing of any one, and you may suppose that I felt very hopeful of getting out of the worst dilemma.

"But, if there had been no Indians in the case, I would

have felt frightened at my situation, for the day was drawing to a close, and it looked very much as if I would be compelled to spend the night alone in that wild country. I had no weapons with me—not even a pen-knife. I had become accustomed to the use of the rifle, but, when I started on my friendly race with George, he had taken my gun to save me the trouble of carrying it.”

“Dat warn’t a werry nice situation for a purty delicate lady,” said Cuff, full of genuine sympathy for the fair narrator.

“I had been riding toward the south during this last part of my journey, and when I looked off to the west on my left hand I could see a vast chain of mountains, so high that their tops were covered with snow.

“The very sight of them caused me to turn my head away with a shudder. I was overwhelmed with a sense of my loneliness, and with a sort of terror I struck my wearied horse into a gallop, with the hope of getting him away from the dreadful scene as soon as possible.

“A half-mile distant and nearly in the direction I was pursuing, I could see a hill considerably higher than that I had just left, and I made for that, in the hope that I might catch sight of something that would guide me toward where my friends were.

“But when I drew up on the top of the second hill, the same scene of desolation closed me round, and I fairly cried in my despair, for it was beginning to get dark, and there did not seem the slightest possibility of my escaping what I so much dreaded, a night alone in the solitude.

“I had just started my horse forward again, when I heard a shout, and turning my head, I saw four mounted Indians, no more than a hundred yards behind me, running at full speed.

“It appeared as if they must have sprung up from the ground, so sudden was their appearance.

“My poor horse was wearied and exhausted, but he understood the danger as well as I, and he started off at his swiftest run, plunging away like a war-horse.”

“And did he git you off safe?” was the absurd question of the excited Cuff.

"He would have done so, had not the wretches begun firing at him. I wish they had shot me instead, but they only aimed at him."

"Did dey hit him?"

"Every shot must have struck him, for he groaned, and leaped hard in his agony. He made a noble struggle to save me, but they would not let him, and he suddenly fell dead, and came very near crushing me under him."

"By the time I could free myself from the saddle, they had come up, and the result is I am here," added Rosalie, in the very accents of despair.

CHAPTER X.

RED-SKIN AND WHITE MAN AT IT.

It will be remembered that we left Long Ike, the trapper, in the vicinity of the Indian camp, with his interest greatly excited in Rosalie Blackwood, the captive, while he kept speculating as to what he could do to assist her in her distress.

Thus affairs stood, when he saw the negro Cuff brought along by two Indians and deposited upon the ground in front of the others. Before he could make certain whether he was dead or not, the darkey settled the matter by rising to his feet and addressing those around in the style of a man that was very much alive.

While Long Ike, from his safe concealment in the wood, was a witness of all this, the old question came back to him as to that remarkable influence that Cuff possessed over the Indians.

Now he concluded there would be given a fair test of it. Cuff himself was a prisoner, and if he could extricate himself unharmed, then the old hunter was ready to believe that there was some witchcraft about the whole business.

He believed that Cuff had been among the red-skins before, and he looked for some signs of recognition between him and the savages gathered around.

He saw none, except the curious salute that the darkey gave the two warriors, as we have described elsewhere.

He was at a loss to understand what this meant, but he could see nothing very wonderful in it, and he felt again his doubts arising as to the ability of the African to extricate himself from such an uncomfortable dilemma as this.

The trapper began to grow impatient, when he saw Cuff and the young lady begin a conversation that was permitted to continue uninterrupted, and he concluded to absent himself for a time at least.

He wished to make the round of his traps, and see that every thing was properly arranged for the coming day. The night was nearly gone, and he had some hope that as a result of the extraordinary turn events had taken, he was more likely than before to gain some knowledge of the Indian thief that had been such a thorn in his side for so long a time.

He did not believe the Indians were likely to leave their encampment for several hours, and if they did, it would be easy enough for him to overhaul them, whether they traveled by land or water.

Consequently he felt no hesitation in backing out, and withdrawing from the immediate neighborhood of the camp.

As soon as he considered himself beyond sight and hearing he changed his course, so as to reach the stream some distance above where he had left his canoe. Here he paused a few moments, but, in looking out on the moonlit water, he could neither hear nor see anything suspicious, and he continued on down the creek, for the purpose of reaching his boat in which to cross over in.

"Things look kind of queer back thar at camp," he muttered, as he picked his way along, "but I don't know as they are either. When the varmints get hold of a prisoner they generally keep him awhile, till they've got all the fun they can out of him, and then they put him through some fancy dances.

"The gal I 'spose they'll keep, fur she's too much style to shoot, and that big lot of ha'r is altogether too nice to skulp—hello!"

This exclamation was caused by coming in sight of one of

the Indian canoes that was drawn up the bank, and so well concealed—although there was no apparent effort toward concealment—that he came very near stumbling over it.

As his own boat was still several hundred yards distant, he concluded that he would appropriate this instead of going on to hunt for his own, and thus save to himself considerable valuable time.

"Thar ain't anybody that owns them boats," he muttered as he proceeded very deliberately to take charge of this one. "This looks very much like mine, and I'll be hanged if it ain't!" he exclaimed in considerable excitement, as his experience enabled him to recognize it very readily in the darkness.

The trapper, when he found that some one had made the attempt to steal his property, was filled to bursting with indignation.

"They've been stealin' my furs all the time, and they're arter my boat, and the next thing they'll be arter my ha'r—"

He paused abruptly, for as he was in the very act of shoving the canoe into the water, he detected a slight noise behind him, and close at hand, which he knew, on the instant, was caused by an approaching Sioux.

As quick as a flash, Ike straightened up from bending over the canoe, leaving his rifle, as he did so, lying upon the ground, while he stepped back a pace or two, drew his long savage hunting-knife, and awaited the coming of his enemy.

The trapper had some fear that there might be two or three warriors approaching, in which case he was in for a desperate scrimmage. But he had stood thus but a moment or so, when he became certain that there was but a single man.

"That's the tune that tickles my ear," he said with a great grin, "and if I could only be sartin that it was the thief that's been here stealin' my furs, I'd be a happy man, as I sailed into his carcass."

He had scarcely time to revolve these thoughts in his mind, when a tall, powerful Indian, fully as large as himself, came to view, and was on the point of stooping over to pick up the canoe, when he saw that it had been disturbed, and with an exclamation of anger he straightened up and looked about him.

In the darkness, he caught the outlines of the hunter standing but a few feet away, and more than ready to receive his attack.

The savage was caught off his guard for an instant—but only for an instant. The next he had drawn his weapon and the two stood face to face.

“You’re a coward—a dog—a thief!” called out Ike, speaking in the Sioux tongue, so as to make certain that his foe understood him. “You steal my furs, and now you come to steal my canoe. A thief always comes in the night.”

This taunt was intended not only to exasperate his foe, but in the hope that he would say something that would provoke a reply which would reveal whether he was the hated thief or not.

The reply came without the least delay, in his own tongue.

“You are the thief, not the Sioux. You come into their hunting-grounds and steal our animals. I have seen none of the furs or the traps of the white man, but I find his canoe, and I take it with me; the Sioux shall take his scalp with him back to the camp of his brothers.”

“You’re welcome to my ha’r, you old copper-colored coward, if you can get it,” replied Ike, expressing this vigorous defiance in his own rough English.

And then, thinking that he might not be so readily understood, he made haste to translate it into Sioux.

“You must take my ha’r, or I’ll take yours. It’s a fight between the red-man and the white, and I only wish I had another of your men before me that I might show you both what poor warriors you are.”

“The Sioux shall drive all the white men from our hunting-grounds. They have no right there, and the warriors shall drive them all away.”

“That’s the way you chaps have talked for the last two hundred years, and I s’pose you’ll all keep on talking in the same style, as long as there is one of you dogs that hasn’t gone to his happy hunting-grounds.”

“Many white men have gone before us,” replied the warrior, speaking the truth, “and many more shall yet be sent.”

“But I hain’t been sent yet, my old skunk,” replied the angry trapper, dropping back into his own language, which

no doubt, the red-skin understood well enough for his purpose. "You've been talking and bragging and blowing for some time, and standing thar and doin' nothing. S'pose you stop talkin' now, and, as you've got your knife, why don't you pitch in and settle the business at once?"

All this preliminary chaffing was intended by each to excite the other to the highest degree of anger—a proceeding which was altogether superfluous, as nothing could make them hate each other more intensely than they now did.

It made no difference that Long Ike was satisfied that this was not the thief for which he had been searching so long. He belonged to the abominated race, and he had stolen his canoe, and what more could he want than that?

The two enemies had not stood like schoolboys, taunting each other, the one ready to run the moment his opponent stepped toward him, and both brave only in words.

The delay and "chin music" was indulged in by each in order to gain an advantage, which, if gained, would be no slight one, to whomsoever should be so fortunate as to acquire it.

Long Ike was desirous of making his foe attack him, and that was what was the matter with the Sioux; but the latter, growing impatient at the delay, suddenly assumed the offensive, and advanced upon his aggravating foe.

This was what the latter wanted, and he was ready.

A moment later, the two knife-blades crossed and flashed fire, and then, after some feinting and parrying, they came together, and the combat at once became like that of two tigers.

The fight was as short as terrific. The combatants were nearly matched in strength, but the trapper had the advantage in possessing a greater knowledge of pugilism. He parried and struck better, and he rarely aimed a blow that did not tell.

No more than five minutes could have passed after the fight had opened, when Long Ike the trapper straightened up, and gave utterance to a curious sigh.

"Thar's one less varmint to steal canoes, and skulp women and children. Ef we could only go to work and ciew 'em all out, 'twould be the best job that war ever done for this country."

It was already growing light in the east, and the trapper was afraid to delay his departure any longer, lest he should be seen by some of the other Indians further up the bank.

So he sprung into the canoe, caught up the paddle and shoved out into the stream. Here he paused but a moment, and then he sped away for the other shore.

Only a few of his powerful strokes were needed, when he shot in under the bushes, and sprung out again, and then with a hurried step, started to make his round of his traps.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRANGER'S ADVENT.

FROM the point of landing to where the trapper had made his home, during the past few weeks, was distant in a straight line about two miles; but taking in the traps, as he intended on his return, this would be increased by nearly as much more.

It was a principle with Long Ike never to leave any of his traps unvisited, when there was a probability of there being game in them, unless something over which he had no control should interfere to prevent. He would rather shoot a dozen Sioux than cause any unnecessary suffering to the most insignificant of God's creatures.

Besides there remained the old feeling of curiosity regarding the fur-thief, which had seemed to haunt him for so long a time, and actuated by these different motives, he turned aside until he reached the creek, where he had left Cuff the night before keeping watch.

He had already formed his theory regarding the capture of the darkey, which although not precisely correct was still very reasonable.

Long Ike supposed that, failing to discover any thing tangible in the place where he had left him, he had become impatient and moved down the river, following really in his tracks.

There, while engaged in hunting or rather watching, he had fallen asleep, and while in that condition he had been discovered by the Indian scouts and carried up to the camp.

The sun was just rising when Long Ike reached the spot where Cuff had begun his memorable watch, and the sight of the dead beaver puzzled him somewhat; but, by "putting this and that together," he finally reached a satisfactory explanation.

"Took him for a varmint," he laughed, "but found he was a beaver instead; and now I remember, I thought I heard a gun when I was down by the junction, and it must have been Cuff a-blazin' away at that poor critter."

An examination of the trap showed that it had been undisturbed by any one during the night, nor could any moccasin prints be discovered in the yielding earth.

Satisfying himself upon these points, the trapper continued his round until he reached the last trap, when he rapped out a wicked oath.

The anger of the trapper was very natural, for in this last trap had been a beaver, that was now gone, and all around were the prints of the mysterious moccasin.

While Long Ike had been intently engaged elsewhere, the thief had repeated his performance for the dozenth time.

The old trapper stood a moment looking down at the ground, while his face was white with rage.

Then, as he could do nothing less nor more, he undertook the old effort of following the trail, in the hope of gaining some clue to where it led.

As he feared, it took him to the edge of the water, where, of course, his search was at an end, and looking down-stream he could discern nothing that could afford him any more light on this all-perplexing matter.

"Ef Cuff wasn't in this blamed scrape," growled Ike, after he had stood a few minutes in meditation, "I'd dig out of these quarters. I don't mind it when one of the varmints gits ahead of me for once, 'though it ain't often they do that, but when it gits to be twenty times, then I'm kerflummuxed, and think I'd better make tracks before it gits to be known all over the country."

He was standing, at this time, in a place where the woods

were unusually dense, and where he had scarcely any view at all except when he looked across the stream.

He was on the point of turning away, when he heard some one moving through the woods directly behind him.

Like a flash he leaped behind a tree, cocked his rifle, and waited for the stranger to show himself.

His movements and manner showed he had no suspicion of any one else being in the vicinity, for he walked steadily forward, and a few minutes later reached the stream almost at the same spot where the trapper was standing but a short time before.

The surprise of Long Ike may be imagined, when, instead of a Sioux Indian, as he had expected, it proved to be a white man.

More than that, he was a stranger in these parts, as could be seen at a glance. He was a young man, scarcely more than five and twenty, dressed somewhat like a fashionable sportsman, rather good looking, with a mustache and well-cut features. He carried a fine silver-mounted rifle over his shoulder and his appearance was that of a horseman who had ridden a long ways, and had dismounted from his horse but a few minutes before.

He seemed surprised upon reaching the edge of the stream, and stood looking out upon it, as if making some guess as to what its depth could be.

While he stood thus engaged, Long Ike stepped out from behind the tree, that he might give him a view, but the stranger did not see him at once.

"I shall have to bring up my horse," he said, speaking to himself, "and let him ford or swim across as the case may—hullo! a friend!" he exclaimed, as he caught sight of the trapper.

Looking steadily at him a moment, he made a sort of military salute, and then walked toward him, frankly extending his hand.

"Few things could give me more pleasure than to meet one of my own race, in such an accursed country as this."

Long Ike rather liked this fair, open style, and he did not hesitate to return the grip with as cordial a pressure as he received.

"Ain't you a little out of your reckoning, stranger?" he asked.

"I can't say about that; it's several days since I left the company of white people, but I started on purpose for this region. I am hunting after a person, to tell the truth."

"Who is he?"

"It's a young lady, that a party of thieving Sioux ran away with, some days ago, when she was out riding."

"Tell me how it was."

The young man, who gave his name as George Parham, told a story, the main particulars of which are already known to the reader, through the medium of the captive Rosalie Blackwood.

When he had reached the point where he saw signs of Indians, and realized that the young lady was exposed to a great danger of which she had no suspicion; he said that he rode down the swell of the prairie, in full pursuit of the Sioux who were in hot chase after her.

He was out of sight of his own companions, and as bad fortune would have it, was mounted on a horse, of only moderate speed, so that after an hour or two's chase, he found that he was out of sight of everybody.

The feelings of Rosalie, so vividly pictured by herself, were a very fair sample of his own, when he saw the night closing in, while he seemed totally powerless to do the least thing to help her.

He continued riding forward, in the faint hope that she might have succeeded in eluding her cunning pursuers, and that fate would enable them to meet again.

But, when night at last settled over, and enveloped him and his animal, he was compelled to give up, and to ask himself the wisest course to pursue.

There really seemed to be but one thing he could do, and that was, to make his way back to the fort and procure the assistance of more experienced men than he.

This, it may be said, afforded scarcely the least grounds for faith that her friends would ever look upon her again; for, when a party of Sioux Indians get fairly started Northward with a prisoner, it requires almost a miracle to restore him or her to their family and friends again.

But, as we have remarked, the distracted George Parham would do nothing else, and he lost no time in making his way back to the fort, and stating the whole terrible truth.

He was angered and amazed at the reception the news met. Rosalie Blackwood was a distant relative of one of the officers at the post and she, with a party of others, had been making a sort of excursion or visit to the place, with the purpose of proceeding eastward, in a few days, under the charge of a strong escort.

George Parham, as has been stated in another place, was one of the same company, and had made the journey as the escort of the young lady, so that it was natural that his feelings should be more intense than the others; but, when he was told by the relative that Rosalie would never be seen again, and that it would only be a waste of time and effort to seek to recover her, he was about as indignant as a man could well be.

Without wasting words upon this wretch, he went to the commandant, and asked that a small escort might be furnished him, with which an effort at least might be made to rescue the young lady---hinting that if she could not be recaptured *vi et armis*, there was a chance of securing her by paying a heavy ransom.

This reasonable request was met by a point-blank refusal. The commandant said that he had not the number of men that he needed. He had made repeated applications to the commander of the department for reinforcements, and instead of securing them, he had actually been compelled to send a squad of twenty to a post that was three hundred miles nearer civilization than was he.

He could easily give the distressed lover a score of good Indian-fighters--but to send them northward in pursuit of a hunting party of Sicux would be their death-warrant.

Nothing would please the red-skins more than to have such a proposal carried out, by which they would be given a chance of securing that number of additional scalps.

And all this being as was represented, Mr. Parham was requested to put on mourning for his lost lady-love; not to bother other parties about her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COMPACT.

WHEN young Parham had reached this point in his story, his eyes flashed with anger.

"I was so amazed by my reception and treatment, when I mentioned this topic, that I knew not what to do or say, for several minutes.

"But when I recovered myself, I called the colonel some pretty rough names, and if other parties hadn't interfered, I should have struck him. It seemed so outrageous that a party of armed men should sit idle in the fort, when they had the fleetest of horses at their command, and were trained to fight Indians, and should permit a young lady to be carried away, almost under their very eyes, that I denounced it in hot language.

"I said if I could get no one to accompany me, I would go alone, and that the man who would be deterred from befriending a lady by the thought that possibly he might receive some harm, was no man, but a coward.

"Mind you, the soldiers themselves were willing enough to go on the expedition, but they could not do so, without the consent of their owner—so my words were all thrown away.

"There were three men, besides myself, who had come with the party from the East, and they were not only ready, but were eager to risk their lives in behalf of Rosalie.

"But I knew better than to allow them to go with me. They could be of no earthly use, and were just the gudgeons that the Indians would like to catch.

"While I was tearing around like mad, I stumbled upon a hunter that had come in a few hours before, and that caused me to make up my mind at once that he was just the man I wanted.

"I made a few inquiries of him, and found that he had spent twenty years in hunting and trapping, could speak the

Sioux tongue, and knew all about them, and was ready for a scrimmage at any time.

"You may be sure," continued young Parham, "that I held fast to him. I offered him a hundred dollars for a couple of weeks' services, and he closed the bargain in the presence of all my friends.

"He had a good animal, and I got one fully as good, and two hours after we rode out from the fort, and started on our hunt."

"Who was he?" asked Long Ike, with no little curiosity.

"Hank Gribbens."

At the mention of this name, the trapper burst into a laugh.

"That 'ere Hank has fooled more people than any hunter I ever knowed. He is a cute chap, is Hank, and he knows how to catch 'em."

"Well, all went along very well for fully a day. I was quite pleased with my guide, who talked in a way that made me quite hopeful. He told me many curious adventures he had had among the Indians, and said that he knew a great many of the Sioux chiefs, some of whom were friendly to him, and he believed, would gladly release the captive—at least for a reasonable ransom.

"Of course, this gave me more and more hope, and when we camped for the night in a grove of timber, and he told me that we weren't more than twenty miles behind the very Indians that we were after, I couldn't have been in much higher spirits, if I had been in actual sight of them.

"I was so pleased with Hank, that I gave him his hundred dollars that night, without waiting until we were on our return, as we had originally agreed."

"That suited Hank, I'll bet," said the trapper with a laugh.

"I don't see why he should have been displeased. It was agreed that he was to act as sentinel during the first part of the night, and I during the rest, and with the most brilliant dreams of success, I went to sleep.

"I didn't wake up until morning, and when I looked around, nothing was to be seen of Hank.

"I thought he might be gone but for a short time, and so I busied myself in starting a fire, and in cooking a part of the small supply of provisions that we had brought with us.

"When a half-hour had passed I began to wonder, and when two hours were gone, I understood very well what it all meant.

"Hank Gribbens, after getting his pay in advance, had deserted me. Every particle of doubt that I had was removed when I came to examine the tracks of the horse, and found that they led directly back over the route that we had been pursuing.

"I followed them for some distance, and then I halted and turned back. I had already had so much to excite my fury, that I don't suppose I was capable of holding much more of it. But I remember, as I sat on my horse, that I felt a sort of gratitude and wonder that he had not stolen that animal also; and, as I looked around, it seemed to me that the greatest pleasure that I could enjoy, would be to put a bullet through the head of that traitor, and then follow it up by shooting the commandant of the fort."

"That's Hank, all over," said the listening trapper; "he is one of the greatest liars and cheats that ever crossed over to this side of the Mississippi, and I don't doubt that there be over a hundred people that feel just as you do, for the dirty tricks he has served them."

"I wondered that some of the men at the fort, who knew him, did not give me an inkling of his true character, but they didn't, and there was nothing to be gained by wondering or bemoaning the result.

"However, Hank did me one service, for which I ought to be thankful."

The trapper looked as if he had a great curiosity to know what all that could be.

"More than once, when we were riding along, side by side, he got to talking of his acquaintances among the hunters and trappers, and there was one he referred to more than he did to any others."

"Who was that?" asked the unsuspecting listener.

"A man that he called Long Ike, and whom he described so minutely, and who blushes so deeply, that I think I am safe in concluding that I am talking to him this very minute."

The trapper laughed.

"I guess you've got me thar, stranger. Did Hank seem to hold any very *tender* recollections of me?"

"He spoke of you with more respect than he did of any one of the score or more of acquaintances that he referred to by name."

"Do you know why?" asked Ike, with a meaning look.

"I suppose because he knew you deserved it."

"Dunno' 'bout that; but Hank didn't used to be so keerful of his tongue, and a couple of years ago we run ag'in' each other down at Fort Leavenworth, and we had one of the biggest fights you ever heard tell on. Hank will fight when you git him into a corner, and he showed more grit than I thought he ever had in him."

"But the end of it all was that I laid him out so flat that it was even chances whether he'd ever come to ag'in' or not. But he did, arter he was laid up for near a month, and arter that, as near as I kin find out, Hank allers speaks of me with considerable respect."

"It is very natural that he should after receiving such treatment at your hands. He might very well consider it the surest way to escape a repetition of the drubbing."

"I don't know how that is, but I can never care much about him, on account of that style that he has of doing business. But how did you know where to look for me?"

"I didn't know precisely where to go, and this meeting is unexpected and providential, and without reflecting any credit upon me. But he told me that you were trapping up this way, and very close to where we wanted to go. He told this so frequently, and under such circumstances, that I believed him; and when I found that he had played me false, I concluded to press on toward the north, in the hope of finding Long Ike and securing his services."

"Fate seems to have stepped in and baffled me at every step, and if I fail at this point I shall give up in despair."

George Parham then made his proposal to the trapper, which was that he was to take charge of the search and press it through to some conclusion. If he would do this, he agreed to pay him a handsome sum if he failed, and double it if he succeeded.

The trapper was glad to make such a contract, for the sum

was more than he had ever made during an entire season's work; but he showed his honesty by refusing to bind his young friend, until he had told him that the young lady for whom he was searching was within a mile or two of them—that he had seen her within the past few hours, and that although he might assist in getting her out of her captivity, and through the stretch of dangerous territory that still remained to be passed, yet her actual release, if accomplished, he believed would be more through the instrumentality of Cuff, the negro, than himself.

This frank statement pleased Parham, who said that while he would only be too glad to reward the negro in a suitable manner, yet his obligation to Long Ike would be none the less binding, and none the less cheerfully assumed upon his part.

"I'm with you, then," said the trapper, extending his hand. "I had made up my mind to go in and do what I could for the gal, afore I knowed that thar was such a chap as you in the world."

"It's a bargain then," replied the pleased young man, as he returned the grip, "and heaven grant its assistance in the rescue!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DESERTED CAMP.

"So it has all come around right, after all," said young Parham, after he had shaken hands with the trapper, and closed the bargain, and expressed himself particularly well satisfied.

"Dunno 'bout that; we've got to wait and see first."

"I mean that this enterprise is in a great deal better shape than before. If Hank Gribbens had not played me his scurvy trick, I would have kept on with him, with not one-half the prospect of success that I now have. I regard it as a very good omen—this curious meeting with you."

"Wal, can't always tell," replied Long Ike, who seemed, in

spite of his expressions of doubt, as if he considered the prospect as a very encouraging one.

"It may have been an unwise proceeding upon my part—that of paying my guide in advance," said Parham, placing his hand in his breast pocket, in a very suggestive way; "but if you will permit me, I will repeat the performance in your case—"

"No, yer don't," interrupted the trapper, with an imperative wave of the hand; "business is business, and that ain't the way to do it. Thar ain't much chance fur me to go onto a spree in this neighborhood, and so it wouldn't do me no good to have any of the stuff' about me. Keep it till we git through, and then I'll be ready enough to take it."

Parham did not urge the trapper to change his decision, for he saw that it would be useless to do so.

"I have left my horse a short distance away," said he, "and as there seem to be Indians not far away, I had better look after him."

"That's it; and we'll be off purty soon to git track of things."

"I may as well own that I am so confoundedly hungry that, if I didn't need my horse so bad, I should have eat him up."

"How long since you have had your fodder?"

"I have eaten only a few berries since yesterday morning."

"If you want to git a good appetite, do as I do, and go without any thing for three days, and then you'll know how to chaw your vittles."

Parham was only too glad to accept the invitation of the trapper, who went with him to where his horse was in waiting, and directed his friend to his own establishment.

This was less than a mile distant, but the way was so broken, and Long Ike took so many precautions against advancing directly upon it, that a great deal of time was consumed ere they reached the curious home among the rocks.

While the horse was making his dinner upon some grass that grew near at hand, young Parham was treated to a good, substantial breakfast, to which he did ample justice.

This done, Long Ike said the time had come for them to start upon the trail of Rosalie Blackwood, who was in the hands of the Sioux.

His belief was that the Sioux would start down the river in their canoes, and that it would be necessary to follow them in the same manner.

Such a moment as this, he calculated, would give Cuff a chance to test fully the genuineness of the spell he seemed to possess over the Indians.

As there was no telling how long he might be gone, Long Ike made it his business to visit and spring all his traps, so as to prevent any needless suffering to the beavers.

Then the horse of Parham was put with the animals of the trapper, which were left to graze in a quiet valley, where they were likely to remain, unless it should happen that they should catch the eye of some Sioux wandering that way.

But these were risks which had to be taken at all times, and nothing was thought of them.

These were about all the arrangements that they could make, when the two moved off in their hunt after Rosalie.

During the few hours that were thus occupied, Long Ike studied the character of his new-made friend with no little interest.

He came to the conclusion that he was courageous, daring and chivalrous, but that he was not likely to be the most useful man that he could have in an enterprise of this kind. He needed more experience in studying the ways of the woods and the peculiarities of Indian warfare, where patience was one of the most indispensable requisites.

If the truth must be told, Long Ike would have preferred to run this business without the help or companionship of Parham.

But, as that was out of the question, he did the best he could, and endeavored to instill some elementary truths into his mind, telling him that there were times, if a man expected to get the better of the Indians, that he would have to play the coward, and consent to all manner of self-degradation, for the sake of winning his point.

George listened attentively, as they made their way along,

and promised that he would be as obedient as a child to all the commands of his master.

And talking and discussing their plan of operations, they continued down the creek, until they reached the junction, a little below which, it will be remembered, he had crossed in his own canoe.

As this was close to where he had had his encounter, and not very distant from the Indian camp itself, he was very circumspect in his movements, compelling his comrade to exercise a great deal more caution than there was any real necessity for.

But he thought there could be no better time for beginning to break him-in, and he seized the first opportunity to do so.

After as careful a reconnoissance as he could make, Long Ike was uncertain whether the Sioux had broke camp and moved away, or whether they were still waiting and making their preparations.

But, as it was all-important that he should be certain, he told Parham that they would cross over and find out.

It would be the hight of imprudence to attempt this at a point where they would be so likely to be discovered, so the trapper picked up his canoe from the ground, as though it were his rifle, and strode away along the bank until he could reach some place where it would be safe to do so.

This they were not long in finding, the curving in the creek being such, that a couple of hundred yards below, he said was as safe a ferry as if they should go a dozen miles further.

So the little boat was deposited upon the surface, Parham took his seat in the prow, while long Ike seated himself in the stern, paddle in hand.

"Thar may be some of the varmints on the river," said he, as they left the shore, "so keep yer peepers peeled and your shootin'-irons ready."

Although this stream was much broader than the one upon whose banks these two persons had first met, yet it was comparatively narrow, and it required only a few seconds for the trapper to place himself upon the shore which he had left early in the morning.

The greater part of the noon was already gone, and in case

the Sioux had taken their departure, the trapper felt that it ought be known, so that they might be pursued, and track kept of all their movements.

"I'm goin' purty close to the camp," he said, as they drew near the place where he had seen the group, "and I don't know whether it's best to take you with me, or to leave you byar till I come back."

"You needn't be afraid of my doing any thing to betray our presence," replied Parham, who showed a great anxiety to accompany him still further upon the dangerous reconnaissance.

"I s'pose you want to go nearer so as to get a sight of the gal, don't you?"

"That's it," replied George. "I have been picturing to myself, all the way here, the privilege of doing so. I hope you will not deny me."

"I don't like to do so, but I'm a little afeard."

"If it's against your judgment, you have but to say so, and I shall submit without a murmur."

It was this frank acquiescence that won the day for Parham. Had he insisted upon his right, he would have failed.

"Confound it, when you talk that way, what's the use of my saying no? Come ahead; you know as well as I do the risk you run. All you have to do is to keep still, and I want you to stay 'bout ten feet in the rear of me, and not come any nearer."

Parham laughed.

"A very prudent arrangement, only I don't see as it is going to give me much of a chance of seeing Rosalie. I suppose you will go near enough to get a peep, and if I must keep ten feet off it will take pretty good eyesight to discern anything beyond you."

"I mean you're to do that till I 'low you to come nigher. When I see thar's a safe chance fur you, you'll git it."

This was a very fair arrangement, and Parham readily gave his consent to it.

Long Ike began to suspect that the Sioux were gone, for he was close upon the old camp-ground, and al. seemed as still as the tomb.

Still such a state of affairs could very well be, with a hundred Indians around them in the wood, and he placed no great reliance upon it.

He moved as quietly forward as a creeping panther, while Parham, remembering his instructions, rigidly adhered to them and kept himself fully a dozen feet in the rear of his guide.

The latter was surprised and pleased at the style in which his patron kept up his progress—doing it with such quiet and stealth that he frequently looked over his shoulder to make sure whether he was really following or not.

A few minutes after, Long Ike raised his hand, as a signal for him to stop. Parham did so on the instant, and riveted his eyes upon the trapper.

He saw him crouch down like a wild animal about to make a spring, while he thrust his hand forward, and carefully separated the bushes ere he advanced, moving very slowly, and turning his head from side to side, and using all his faculties, while making the reconnoissance.

In a few moments he paused, straightened up and turned about.

“Come on; thar ain’t any varmints to be afeard of.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WATER-TRAILS.

GEORGE PARHAM was taken all aback at the information of the trapper, for in making this reconnoissance, it had once occurred to him that there was such a thing possible as that there could be no Indian camp-fire to reconnoiter.

Long Ike threw off his caution and reserve at once, in such a decided manner as to prove that he had no fears of danger at all.

As Parham came up beside him, he gave out that low laugh of his, and said: “We may as well face ’bout and go t’other way, fur the Injins have been gone a long time, and ar’ further off than I ’spected.”

"Have they gone through the wood or down the river?"

"We'll soon see," as he advanced to where the camp-fire had been kindled and began examining the ground.

The next moment he said: "They've made for the river; that'll be good for you."

"Why so?" asked Parham, with some surprise. "I don't understand you."

"It's more tiresome to tramp all day through the wood, than to set in a canoe and have some one paddle you along, ain't it?"

The young man could not deny but that it was, but he hoped that the trapper had a better opinion of him than to suppose that his part in this business would be to sit down and fold his hands.

He had some curiosity to examine the deserted camp-ground, and they remained a few minutes to do so.

There were fragments of meat and bones scattered here and there, and the cinders were still glowing, proving that no great time had passed since the red-skins had been gathered there.

"Do you see that tree?" asked Long Ike, pointing to the trunk that lay upon the ground.

"Of course, I do."

"Wal, right on that is where I see'd that gal of your'n a-sittin', and right thar, on the ground clus' by her, was my darkey Cuff, a-talkin' to her. The same darkey that you used to have."

The lover stood for a minute in silence looking at the trunk, which in his eyes assumed something of a sacred character.

It was there, he reflected, that the idol of his heart had sat in her despair and anguish, doubtless believing that all her earthly friends had forsaken her. It was there that she must have pictured the future in all its terrible colors.

Her talk with the negro must have given little comfort to each, for Parham could not understand how either could have any hope of escape from bondage, when they recalled that they were not only captives in the hands of one of the worst tribes on our frontier, but that they were far removed from any probable assistance.

The nearest fort had refused to send a squad of men in

pursuit, when urged to do so, and outrageous as he considered the refusal, he could not but believe that those making it knew far better than did he, the prospects of success or failure.

Long Ike had hinted nothing of the strange suspicion he held regarding the ability of Cuff to get the upper-hand of the Indians.

He was reluctant to say any thing about it, for, as he could not understand it himself, he was certain that no one else could, and the result would be only a disappointment and aggravation.

It would be time enough to discuss the mystifying matter when Cuff should give some new evidence of it.

If the darkey could possibly succeed in getting himself and Rosalie out of the clutches of the red-skins, then they would compel him to disgorge the momentous secret he carried.

Until then, Long Ike was willing that he should keep all knowledge of it to himself, without interference from him.

Parham was still standing in his reverie, when the trapper recalled him to his senses.

"No use of standin' thar, and watchin' that tree, fur I don't b'lieve the gal will ever be see'd a-sittin' thar."

"I am ready any moment that you want me," replied Parham, throwing his rifle over his shoulder, in position to move off in any direction.

"Come on then, we'll foller the trail toward the stream."

Where so many moved off in a body, it was an easy matter to follow them.

The trail, as expected, led directly to the water, where of course they had taken their canoes, and, as Long Ike had remarked, were no doubt many miles away at the present moment.

"How can you tell whether they have gone up, or downstream?" asked Parham, as he took his place in the stern of the canoe.

"You can't tell to a real sartinty of course, by looking at the shore and the water, and so you have to take other means to judge, and you kin make it just as sartin that way, as if you stood on the bank and see'd 'em shove off."

As his young friend showed some curiosity to find out more fully what he meant, the trapper continued:

"From what I know of these Sioux, I know that when they're at home, they're off to the east of us. When they catch a gal and mean to keep her, they start for their home. Thar's been two parties of 'em hyar, and they've met at this place by app'intment, and then have all started fur home together. Ef you wanted to leave the fort with your friends and go back to whar you b'long on the other side of de Mississippi, I guess you wouldn't go west to do it, would you?"

Parham could not but admit that this logic was good, which the trapper proceeded to strengthen by saying:

"If they war going up-stream, they would go on land, fur the stream just above is so narrer and runs so fast, that it would be too hard work to go it fur any distance in thar boats, while goin' t'other way, you see, they have all the advantage."

Parham professed himself fully satisfied, and now that they considered themselves fully started in the pursuit of the fleeing Sioux, he considered it important that his comrade should understand some of the difficulties it would be necessary to overcome, together with the fact that they were engaged upon nothing like a holiday or pleasure excursion.

There were two points against which it was all-important that they should guard.

They were peculiarly liable, in following the Indians, to discover themselves to them, or, in case the latter encamped, to pass them by.

To commit either of these mistakes would be almost certain not only to defeat their purpose, but to get them into the worst kind of difficulty.

On the other hand, Long Ike did not believe it probable that the Sioux would halt before night, when, on account of the squaws and children, they would go into camp, provided they did not reach the end of their water journey before nightfall.

Should it prove that not more than a dozen miles remained to be made by water, it would follow, as a matter of course, that they would land, and then it would be no light task to learn at what precise point this was done.

While the trapper was tolerably certain that it would be

upon the northern shore, yet he knew very well that nothing was easier than to be mistaken, and, as a consequence, to be led astray.

With this difficulty before them, there remained the additional necessity of guarding against running so hard upon the heels of the Sioux, as to apprise them of the pursuit.

As a means of preventing such a calamity, Long Ike kept his canoe close in to shore, so that, by a quick, powerful sweep of the paddle, he could shoot the boat out of sight.

And then, upon reaching a bend in the stream, he made it a practice to check the progress of the canoe very much, until he could take a "peep around the corner," as it were, and make sure that the coast was clear before venturing upon it.

The arrangements completed and understood, Long Ike proceeded promptly to carry them out.

Deeming it hardly safe to trust to Parham's sagacity upon such a delicate and critical matter as this, the trapper placed himself as near the front as he could, without interfering with his use of the paddle, and thus the journey began.

Fortunately the weather remained propitious, and but for the anxiety that existed in the breast of the lover, he would have enjoyed the excursion.

But now, when he felt that he was really in pursuit, and there was hope of coming up with the Indians, his impatience became very great, and he thought that a great deal of the deliberation and delay of the trapper was unnecessary, and but for the promises he had given, he would have protested against it.

However, every thing passed along pleasantly until noon came and passed. Not a sign of a wild Indian or animal had been seen since their starting.

Long Ike had carefully scanned each shore, as they glided along, and was convinced that the Sioux had not yet landed, but were still below them upon the stream, and he was sanguine of catching them by nightfall.

But night was several hours off, when both of them were not a little startled by descrying the smoke of a camp-fire rising above the trees on the left bank.

As the river made quite a curve between where the two men were and the point where this sign appeared, it was hard to tell whether the fire was kindled along the shore, or some distance back among the trees.

As it was important that the truth should be known, the trapper coasted along the bank very slowly, and with a great deal of care, until, at the head of the curve mentioned, he made the discovery that the camp was not near the water, but quite a distance away from it.

"I guess we're on their track," said Long Ike, as he backed water, and ran the canoe some distance up the stream until he could reach a point where it would be safe to cross to the proper side.

This done, he made haste to send the little vessel across the creek to the northern bank.

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNPLEASANT DISCOVERY.

WHEN the trapper had effected their landing, he drew the canoe up the bank and concealed it with as much care as though the fate of himself and companion depended upon its preservation.

By this time it was apparent that the camp-fire stood back fully a hundred yards from shore; and, instead of proceeding directly toward it, he guided his course so as to cross the trail between the fire and the river.

Only a few minutes were required to accomplish this, and when he struck it, he paused and made a critical examination.

This examination was thorough but brief.

"That's good!" he exclaimed, as he straightened up, "I'm afraid that it was a blind, but the whole party have landed here, and I guess they don't mean to go back to the river ag'in."

"And why not?" inquired Parham, with no little interest.

"'Cause this ar' the nearest p'int to thar home. I zon't b'lieve thar lodges ar' many miles to the north, and they'll keep on through the woods till they reach 'em."

"See here," said his companion, as they were about to start forward, "suppose we do come up with them, Ike, what then? How do you propose to effect the rescue of Rosalie? Remember that you have not given me your plans as yet."

"'Cause I can't," was the blunt response. "No feller who's in this business can tell what he's goin' to do till he's on the ground and has took all his bearin's. Are you afeard to let me try?"

"Don't misunderstand me," Parham hastened to say; "it's only my curiosity that leads me to ask the question. You have answered sufficiently, so go ahead and take the lead, as you have done heretofore."

As they approached the vicinity of the camp, the trapper again resorted to the most extreme caution.

He compelled his young friend to remain still further than heretofore in the rear, it being understood that if it could be done with safety, he should be permitted to approach and make his coveted observation.

Long Ike did not occupy much time in making his observation, when he came back with the same word that he had given before.

The fire was burning, but not a solitary Indian was to be seen.

"I don't see what they kindled the fire fur," he said, with a perplexed air. "It might be, howsumever, that they stopped to cook some fodder. I'll take a look round, and see what's to be l'arned, afore we foller on. I don't b'lieve they're fur off."

Near where the halt had been made ran a small stream of water, and a slight examination made it plain that the halt had been made for the purposes indicated.

Parham fancied even that he could detect the smell of cooking meat in the air, although the trapper refused to believe his olfactories were keener than his.

He was engaged in scrutinizing the soft earth near the edge of the water, where numerous footprints were to be seen,

when he gave a sudden exclamation of surprise and indignation.

"What's up now?" asked Parham, hastening to his side.

"Do you see that?" he asked, pointing down to where an indentation made by a single, rather small-sized moccasin was plainly visible.

The young man identified it from the fact that it was a little apart from the others, and the trapper stooped down so as to indicate it from the others.

"There are plenty similar," said he, when he had made certain what it was that so excited his friend; "what is there peculiar about it?"

"That's the track of the varmints that has been stealin' my peltries fur the last two weeks."

"I didn't know that you had been troubled in that way."

Thus reminded of his remissness, the trapper proceeded to relate as hurriedly as possible the annoyances that he had suffered from the mysterious Indian thief, and then added:

"I've seen that track too many times to be mistook about it—that's it, sartia, and now, if that gal wasn't to be took into account, I'd foller that party to the north pole, so as to git squar' with that varmint."

And without waiting to give any more explanation, he turned about, and walked away upon the trail, with an angry step, Parham hurrying after him, and wondering what it was all to amount to.

Now and then Long Ike could be heard muttering to himself, like one whose passions are excited to a high pitch, and who was unconscious that he had a companion, or that he had any thing to do, except to resent some terrible wrong that he had suffered.

His demeanor caused the lover some misgivings, but he concluded that all would be right in the end, as Long Ike was too much of a veteran to permit his judgment to be run away with upon such an important occasion as this.

The ground over which they made their way was very rough and uneven, being frequently crossed by ravines and hills, but the woods continued very dense, and there was no need of either of the couple running into any danger.

The afternoon was well gone, and the night was settling

over the wood, but still nothing more had been seen of the Indians.

But Long Ike, who relapsed into something like his former self, said he had no doubt but that they were close upon them, and before long would be given sight of the entire company.

The village toward which they were making their way was still many miles to the north, and probably would not be reached before the succeeding night.

He had hardly said this, when they descended quite a steep acclivity, and at the same moment caught the glimmer of a fire among the trees.

"There they are, sure enough," exclaimed Parham, in an excited undertone.

"Yes, and like 'nough they've got some of the varmints on the watch, so you kin stop just where you be till I go ahead ag'in, and take another look."

It was a weary, tiresome business—this waiting for the return of the trapper, and Parham was strongly tempted to follow on after him, and take a look at things on his own account.

But such an action would have been unjustifiable, and he had too much sense to be guilty of it.

He knew that there was no blundering this time—the camp-fire glimmering among the trees just beyond, was a genuine one. Sounds had reached his ear which told him that the Sioux were there gathered then; and even from where he stood, concealed behind the tree, he had caught glimpses of moving figures that told the story too plainly for him to mistake it.

The thought that he was thus close to Rosalie, who had been called upon to go through such a terrible experience, excited strong emotions in the breast of the lover, and caused his heart to beat with a hope which he had not felt since the terrible experience of the poor girl.

"Lord grant that this attempt at rescue may not miscarry!" he exclaimed to himself more than once, "for if it should then indeed there will be no hope for Rosalie. If she has sustained herself so well so far, she will hold out no longer."

He was puzzled to understand in what way the trapper proposed to work; although he was hopeful, he could not convince himself that they were engaged in a most desperate enterprise.

When fifteen minutes had passed, and he saw and heard nothing of Long Ike's return, he began to grow impatient.

"He has forgotten his promise to come back and let me participate," he said to himself, "or else some scheme has struck him so favorably that he means to act upon it at once."

The latter proposition was hardly probable; but when a full half-hour had gone, Parham was so uneasy that he needed scarcely a word of urging to march upon the camp himself.

But happily at this opportune moment, Long Ike made his appearance.

His long absence caused the young lover to look anxiously at him, with a faint hope that he might have companions.

But he was alone, and he brought a strange story.

"I'm kerflummuxed!" said he, with a sort of desperation. "Was never cotched so fair and square in my life afore."

George Parham waited with the most intense anxiety to hear what he meant.

"I've been round and round that camp three times, and looked at every varmint over and over ag'in, and the end of it all is that neither Cuff, the darkey, nor the gal is among 'em."

"How is that?" demanded the young man, in amazement.

"That's just whar I'm kerflummuxed," replied the trapper, in that puzzled way of his. "I can't understand what it means; I don't know whar the gal can be."

"Haven't the party divided, and one gone on with her?"

"That's what I thought at fust, but it can't be, because I've counted 'em over ag'in and ag'in. Thar war just seventeen, countin' in the squaws, arter they had j'ined up at the junction, and thar's just seventeen thar now. So you see that ar' thing won't do."

"But you must have some theory of your own," com

tinued Parham, with a terrible chill creeping over his heart.

"Wal, I have," said Long Ike, in a slow, deliberate voice, "and if you can stand it, I'll tell you what I think."

"Out with it, Ike; any thing is better than this suspense."

"It's my 'pinion, then, that the Sioux have killed the darkey and the gal and pitched 'em into the river. You see how easy it would be for 'em to do it, and I'm sartin the prisoners, arter goin' on the water didn't land ag'in."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DREAD CALL.

It is now time that we returned to Rosalie and Cuff, and give an account of the strange experience to which they were doomed.

The two Indians who knew of the negro were not long in making known to their companions something of the remarkable mystery that hung about him.

They were the only two who had seen him, but several of the others had heard the strange rumors, and it naturally followed that they viewed him with increasing interest.

Cuff was on the watch for this same thing, and he was quick to observe and profit by it.

He affected a certain solemnity of deportment, which among the whites would have been considered ridiculous pomposity; but, as viewed by the Indians, was highly impressive, and accorded with those curious, chilling stories that had reached their ears.

At the time we closed our last reference to them, the night was about ended, and in a short time day began breaking.

It was hardly light when the whole party were in active motion, making ready for the move down the river.

None of the party seemed to have slept through the night—nor did they appear in particular need of it.

There was enough meat among them to furnish a meal for all without sending out the hunters; and only a few minutes were occupied in attending to their inner wants, when the party embarked in three separate canoes, and the journey down the river was begun.

It had been the hope and partial expectation of Cuff that he would be placed in the same canoe with Rosalie, but such was not the case, and they were separated as far as possible—the being in the front boat and he in the rear.

A distance of some twenty feet separated each, so that it was impossible to communicate with her, and he was thus compelled to defer some schemes which he had concocted, until a more convenient opportunity should be given him.

In the same boat with Cuff were four warriors, who handled the paddles, while the fifth, seated in the bow, was the chief or leader of the party.

Cuff was in the stern, so as to face the chief most of the time.

By using his ears, as well as his eyes, the darkey learned that the name of this leader was *Co-wa-noc*, or, The Wolf that Never Sleeps.

He was certain that he had heard him referred to before, but he strove in vain to recall the circumstances.

He was inclined to believe that it was at the fort, where he had been spoken of as a bitter enemy of the white race, and one that caused the soldiers frequent trouble.

His manner, his dress, his face and general appearance showed him to be a splendid warrior—one whom any hunter would hesitate to attack; and, as the shrewd darkey surveyed his figure, he uttered a prayer that Fate might never put him in the grasp of *Co-wa-nok*.

The two Sioux whom Cuff had saluted and frightened, as we have described in another place, took good care to avoid the canoe into which he had entered, and got as far away from him as possible, by putting themselves in the forward boat, which was devoted principally to the squaws and children.

It could hardly be possible that the Sioux had any suspicion of pursuit. They knew very well that there was nothing to be feared from the soldiers, many miles away at the fort,

who were stationed there to prevent just such outrages as they had perpetrated.

Had they known to a certainty that two white men were closely following them, it is not likely they would have cared, for what had they to fear from such an insignificant force?

Cuff took in all the particulars of the situation, and remained quiet for a time, as he well might do, seeing that nothing remained for him to accomplish by any other course.

And leaning back in the canoe, as it steadily glided downstream, his head gradually drooped upon his breast, until he sunk off into a deep, heavy slumber.

No one sought to awake him from this, as they had already seen the uselessness of attempting to do so, when he made up his mind to sleep.

And as there was no special need for his being awake, there could be no special objections to his going asleep.

But he had not been in this condition for a half-hour, when a signal was heard from the shore on the right, or toward the south, and instantly the Indians in the three boats stopped paddling, and listened.

Co-wa-nok seemed to recognize the call, and it was scarcely made, when he replied to it, and then commanded the paddling to be resumed, he having seemingly done all that could be done.

A few minutes later, a small canoe shot out from the shore. It was impelled by a single person, who seemed to be an Indian, but who was, in reality, a half-breed, dressed as such.

He was rather small, with a dark, villainous face, black, glittering eyes, and a countenance that stamped him in language too plain to be mistaken as a scamp and scoundrel of the deepest dye.

He was well known to the Indians, and indeed lived among them, although his roving, villainous nature frequently carried him to distant posts and settlements, under the hope that he might be able the better to prosecute his evil doings.

His signal to the Sioux was merely a call to learn where they were, that he might the better join them.

As he came up and took his place among them, he received no particular attention, and, taking it as a matter of course,

he paddled quietly along, until he happened to become aware of the presence of the captives.

He instantly showed great interest in them, asking many questions, and casting such admiring glances at Rosalie, that she resolutely turned her face away, and refused to have a word to say, or to pay the least attention to him.

Then he tried for awhile to awake the darkey, but finding that that could not be done, he concluded he would wait his time.

But no one could fail to see that the half-breed was smitten with the girl. He could not keep his admiring glances away from her, and naturally enough she loathed him more than she did the squaws and warriors around her.

The half-breed was known as Buchees—an Indian name that he had given himself, and the precise meaning of which it is not to be supposed that he knew, if indeed it had any meaning at all.

He made two or three essays to get into the boat where Rosalie was, but she objected so strongly, that the squaws took up the battle for her, and he was compelled to desist.

“Never mind,” he said, as his little black eyes flashed fire, while his dark face flushed with passion, “I’ve fell in love with you, gal, and you can make up your mind that I’m going to have you too. There ain’t many things that Buchees fails to do when he makes up his mind that he is going to do, and he swears that you’re just the pretty critter he’s been looking for, and you’re bound to be his wife.”

This Buchees, it may as well be stated at this point, was the mysterious thief, that had played such mischief with the furs and traps of Long Ike.

His natural aptitude, and great experience in stealing, enabled him to succeed, where the most skilful pilferers of his tribe would have failed.

All was going along quietly and smoothly as the party moved at quite a rapid rate down the stream, and it lacked an hour or so of noon. The air was warm and pleasant, and nothing could be heard but the quiet dip of the paddles.

Thus matters stood, when all were startled by the sound of a groan that seemed to come from one of their own number.

It was so plain and distinct that none failed to hear it, and

even Rosalie raised her head with the others, and looked to see what it meant.

There appeared to be a general impression in the first and last boats, that it had come from some one in the middle ; but it did not, and the occupants of this canoe were in doubt where to look for the cause.

A pause in the paddling followed, and there was a general looking in each other's faces, and all sorts of inquiries as to what was the cause of the alarming sound.

But, curiously enough, no one could be found that knew any thing about it, and Buchees, the half-breed, was the most puzzled one in the company.

Co-wa-nok looked angered, for he believed that some of his warriors had been guilty of falsehood, and he ordered the paddling to be resumed, while he resolved that he would detect the deceiver himself and visit a severe punishment upon him.

Matters were unusually quiet for some minutes, as every man and woman were engaged in listening. But they were not kept long in waiting, when with more terrible distinctness than before, the same dreadful groan pierced the ear of every one in the party.

And as before, not one among them, not even the horrified Co-wa-nok himself, could tell where it came from or by whom caused.

CHAPTER XVII.

CUFF'S SECRET AVOWED.

By this time it may naturally be supposed that the Indians were alarmed at the unaccountable state of things.

Most of them looked toward their chief, as if to inquire what he was going to do about it.

He tried to assume an expression of bravado, but Rosalie saw that he was frightened as much as any one.

Co-wa-nok raised his hand as a signal for the paddling to cease, and by a common instinct the three boats clustered together as if seeking protection from some common danger.

Many, there were no doubt, as they heard these chilling groans, and looked at the dark impassive face of the negro, and saw how soundly he was sleeping, wished that they might do the same.

The dark face of the half-breed seemed to become of an ashy paleness, as he cast alarmed looks in every direction.

While the hush was resting upon all, he gave utterance to a frightful oath and said:

"I do b'lieve that it comes from the air above us. It can't be from the shore."

Clearly that was impossible, as they were too far away.

There were not wanting those among the Sioux who believed the words of the half-breed, for it did seem that the voice was above them, although Rosalie herself thought it more likely that it was from the water.

And still this hushed awe was resting upon all, when the words that followed were uttered in a slow, solemn, and impressive tone:

"Co-wa-nok, great chief of the Sioux, Manitou calls to thee to listen to the words he has to say."

Had the stream over which they were floating suddenly turned to burning flame, the consternation and amazement of the Sioux could not have been greater than it was upon hearing, what every one believed it to be, the voice of the Great Spirit, speaking to their chief by name.

Not a muscle in all that throng moved, and even Cuff, who had been snoring terrifically, seemed involuntarily to shift his head, so that his breathing became quiet, even if his sleep was none the less profound.

It seemed to all, now, that the voice came from the clear ether above, and there was a general upturning of the eyes, as if they would fain look upon the visible form of him who spoke.

But no unusual sight greeted their vision, and a moment later, the same solemn tones were heard:

"Does the great chief, Co-wa-nok, listen to the words of Manitou? Let him give heed to what I say."

the silence could not have been more profound, nor the awe deeper, as the words followed :

"The man who lies in slumber is beloved of Manitou. I shall be displeased if the Sioux lays violent hand upon him, while he sleeps. I speak to Co-wa-nok, and he shall hear me. I command him to let him go his way in peace. Let Co-wa-nok and his warriors come out of the boat in which he slumbers. Place no paddle there, for I will take care of him. Let him float down-stream and all shall be well."

This strange command was obeyed.

As soon as the awe-struck chief could shake off the spell that held him down, he reached over to the nearest canoe, and drew them together. Then he stepped into the other and motioned to his warriors to do the same.

They lost no time in obeying him, taking their paddles with them.

This movement left Cuff alone, in the boat, with no paddle nor even a blanket.

Left thus, his canoe continued drifting away from the others, which were now held stationary by a slight movement of the paddles.

It had gone a yard or so, when the oppressive stillness was again broken by the terrible voice, sounding like the terrible rumble of thunder :

"Does Co-wa-nok listen to the words of Manitou?" He has with him the white Lily of the Wood! Let her be placed in the canoe with my son; give them no paddle, nor food, nor blanket. Manitou will take care of them."

It seemed to Rosalie that she was dreaming. She saw the signal from the chief, and she saw her own boat driven up beside the one in which Cuff lay asleep.

She remembered stepping into the canoe, and taking her seat first in front of the negro, and they continued floating away.

And then once more and for the last time, came these words from the air over their heads, seeming to her awed hearing to sound further away than it had heretofore :

"Co-wa-nok has done well; Manitou will smile upon him; he shall become a great warrior. He shall conquer the nations

around him, and shall become one of his great warriors in the happy hunting-grounds beyond the setting sun."

And then the canoe continued drifting away—drifting away, carried downward by the current of the stream.

And looking back, she saw the Indians resting like statues in their boats, as though the spell was still resting upon them.

By and by it appeared to lift, and using their paddles they headed toward the shore.

She watched them until they reached the land, disembarked, and then they and their canoes were gone.

Rosalie still sat like one in a dream. As she looked back over what had happened during the last few minutes, it all seemed so unreal, that she pressed her hand to her forehead, and tried to make sure that she was really awake.

Yes; she was sitting in a real, tangible canoe, that was floating over an actual stream. And there directly before her, half-lying and half-sitting, with his eyes closed, was the darkey who seemed as oblivious of the outside world as when he was drifting down-stream into the hands of the Sioux.

"Will he sleep forever?" she asked herself, as she looked wonderingly at him, and then, while she was trying to understand what it could mean, she heard again the same voice that seemed to be ringing in her ears:

"How does the young lady like Manitou? Does she think that Cuff kept his promise, or does she still doubt? I guess not."

The voice seemed to begin up in the air over her head, and then to come down, down, until it settled upon Cuff, where it belonged!

And looking at him, he was seen sitting bolt upright, with his face swallowed up in a great grin.

But she had known the secret from the first.

Cuff was a first-class ventriloquist.

"How will dat do, Miss Rosalie? What do you t'ink ob dat?"

"It beats every thing that I ever heard. Herman, nor Wyman, nor Blitz, have ever equaled it. I never knew you were so skillful.

"Was borned with it," replied Cuff, proudly, "allus could

do it, when I was a little shaver. I've had a good deal ob fun wid it. I've been to de shows when Blitz or Wyman war dar, and I've beat 'em all out, and mixed up t'ings so dat I once bu'sted up de show altogedder."

"I should think you could do se very easily—but whatever put it into your head to try it on the Indians? You never told me before."

"You know that I allers knowed sumfin ob it, and one day, when I was at home dar comed an Injin to our house, and I tried some ob my tricks on him. Wal, it scared him so dat he nearly turned white. He started and run away wid a yell, and I s'pects dat he is runnin' yet, onless he's hit his head ag'in' sumfing and bu'sted it.

"Wal, dat gev me an idee, and when we started east on de trip, I made up my mind dat I's gwine to hab some ob de biggest kind ob fun dat you eber heard tell on.

"And so I did. You remember dat when dem Injins come into our camp to trade wid us, and dey heard woices down in de ground, how dey yell'd and run. Mr. Parham almost died laughin'.

"When I went out huntin', and I run into de traps on purpose to scare 'em, I've had 'em all standin' round jist ready to bury all dar tomahawks in my head, and den I'd frow back my head, and shet my eyes, and dey would hear dar Great Spirit commandin' 'em fur to let me go.

"And den I'd hear 'em dust, and when I opened my eyes dar want nobody 'bout dar, and I could jist tramp home ag'in as soon as I could get ober my laughin', which sometimes took me a good while."

"But did they never suspect you?"

"Nebber; it seems to me dat de Injins nebber hab heard ob any such t'ing. Ob course when I tried it 'mong de white trash, dey would know what was up. Didn't you 'spect what dat ar' noise war when you heard it?"

"I did have some such a suspicion, but I did not believe you capable of doing so wonderfully well, and I thought at first it must have been done by one of the Sioux. You pretended to be asleep, and managed it so well that you might have deceived a much wiser person than I am.

"And then," added Rosalie, with a laugh, "the voice was

not like your natural voice at all, and when you spoke, you used language different from what I have been accustomed to hear from your lips. How was that, Cuff?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE STRANGE CANOE.

THE negro, laughed, as he could well afford to do, at the success of his trick.

"It's hard work for me to talk like de white folks, but I can do it when I try hard, and use a different voice. Jest hark !"

And again he gave forth the curious, almost unearthly words, showing his remarkable skill by causing them to sound over their heads, and then under the boat, and then making them die away fainter and fainter, until they seemed to become inaudible on account of their distance solely.

This done, he indulged in some strange musical sounds, imitating different instruments with a success that was almost miraculous.

Cuff was a natural born ventriloquist, and was capable of performing vocal feats that would be incredible unless witnessed.

He did them all, too, with that perfect art which conceals art, and in looking in his face during the performance, no one would have suspected what he was doing—a skill which few professional ventriloquists ever succeed in reaching.

It was a mere whim which led Cuff to conceal his secret from Long Ike the trapper. He had an idea that he would sometime indulge in it at his expense, but he was afraid to do so, for, if he should frighten the hunter into running away, as did the Indians, it would leave him in rather an uncomfortable predicament.

His sleep, it will be understood, was feigned, for it was one of those things which added solemnity and impressive-

ness, when it would seem that none was needed, but where it was safer to have it.

When he tried his skill upon Co-wa-nok, he had so much at stake, that he put in all the extra touches, so that nothing might be neglected that could help to make his work perfect.

It was this which caused the Manitou to command the chief to set the prisoners free, without bread, blanket or saddle—a command which seemed perfectly consistent from such a supposed source.

“It would hab been mighty handy to hab a paddle, and ten or twenty pounds ob meat,” said Cuff, in explaining this point, “but I t’inked dat we could afford to do widout dat fur de fun ob beatin’ ’em out.”

“You couldn’t have acted more wisely,” said Rosalie, with a pleased, grateful look. “You have performed a trick o which you may well be proud all your life; you are worth more than all the soldiers at the fort, for they weren’t able to get me out of the hands of the Sioux, and you have done so.”

“I guess your head am level dar,” said Cuff, greatly delighted with the compliment.

“I shall consider myself safe under your protection, and don’t think I shall consent to part with you until we are well out of this country, of which I have had more than enough, and fervently pray that I may never set eyes upon it again.”

“I promised you dat I’d stick by you, and I’ll do it. We’re only half out ob de trouble. I had a great notion ob axin’ Co-wa-nok fur a gun, but I war a little ’feared, and I don’t t’ink we’ve comed so far, but what we kind find our way back to whar Ike am, wi’dout huntin’ round for more dan two or free weeks.”

Rosalie Blackwood could not but feel grateful for the devotion of the colored fellow, who had kept so well the pledge that he made, when the position of both was so different.

She had about given good-by to all hope, at the time she sat in the canoe, and this was like an awakening from the dead to life.

She knew that George Parham, her devoted lover, would do all he could to effect her rescue; but, as the time passed—

she was unable to see how he, or any one else, could do any thing to assist her.

She felt certain that she was fully a hundred miles from the point where she had been captured—directly among the hunting-grounds of the warlike Sioux, where no force of United States soldiers could follow them, and where, if such a thing as her escape was to be considered, it must come through the cunning of some man who was skillful in the ways of these scamps.

But haply all this was changed, through the smartness of Cuff, the last person to whom she dreamed of turning for help at such a time as this.

The two continued talking until they had passed another bend in the river, and they were far beyond the sight of the Indians.

Then the darkey seemed to awake to the fact that they were going away from instead of toward their friends, and that as the night was close at hand, they were losing valuable time.

"Golly! dis yer will nebber do," exclaimed Cuff; "if we keep on, we'll nebber see Ike or dat lubber ob your'n ag'in. Ef we hain't got any paddles, we kin make 'em ourselves."

Such a small vessel as one of the bark canoes of the Indians is easily moved, and Cuff had no difficulty in turning its head toward land, and sending it forward at quite a moderate rate of speed.

They had passed quite a distance since parting with the Sioux, and night would soon be upon them.

Although the success of Cuff had been complete, as we have already shown, yet Rosalie became sensible of a growing uneasiness. She was apprehensive that some one among the Sioux might suspect the trick that had been played, and that they would do what they could to retrieve the error.

As they drew near shore, she expressed this misgiving to Cuff.

"Nebber fear," was his confident reply. "I've played dat yer ting often 'nough to know how dat it works. I mought hab kept on till dey war ready to fall down and say dar prayers to me."

"I hope you are right," replied Rosalie, only partially re-

assured, "but I have a great deal of fear of that half-breed that they called Buchees."

"How did he act, when de Great Spirit was preachin' to 'em?"

"At first he seemed the most scared of any, and I thought at one time, that he would fall out of his canoe, so great was his terror. But he soon recovered, and he watched you like a cat watching a mouse. I cannot rid myself of the impression that he thought you had something to do with it."

"S'pose he does find it out—what am he gwine to do?" asked Cuff.

"Why, he may get some of the Indians to understand that you deceived them, and persuade him or them to follow us again."

But Cuff grinned and shook his head. He could not be made to believe that. He knew the superstitious nature of the Indians too well, and he understood that the trick he had played, had been too perfect in all its particulars to be undone in this fashion.

He believed this we say, and yet the words of Rosalie caused him a slight uneasiness also.

He felt that the all-important thing for them to do, was to get back to where Long Ike had been left—that no time ought to be lost in getting out of the dangerous neighborhood, so as to ward off any such counter-movement upon the part of the red-skins.

By the time that they reached the shore, night had fully descended, and the woods were found to be quite dark, as the heavy foliage shut out the light of the moon, that shone with considerable power upon the stream.

Here Rosalie and her devoted servant paused a few minutes for consultation.

Had Cuff possessed a paddle, and had he known how to use it with only moderate skill, the true course would have been for him to have stuck to the canoe.

But that was out of the question, and, with only a few minutes' pause, they commenced ascending the stream by keeping to its course, although at times they were compelled to leave it for a considerable time.

This was a toilsome progress, but as both were young and

strong and hopeful, they were not sensible of any fatigue, and they were ready to keep it up until morning, by which time they expected to accomplish a goodly part of the distance.

It was somewhat near midnight, when they found themselves upon the shore of the stream again. Cuff kept the lead, and his spirits seemed exhaustless, as he kept up a continual stream of talk and laugh.

When he feared that she was growing wearied and dispirited, he introduced some of his ventriloquial feats—giving forth such odd sounds and quiddities that Rosalie would have laughed if she knew her death was at hand.

Both were somewhat hungry, but as there seemed to be no means of satisfying any such craving, the matter was not referred to by either.

They were making their way along in this manner, when Cuff was a little startled by coming upon the remains of a camp-fire.

Ashes and embers still glowing were to be seen, and he drew back, thinking that he had struck a camp of sleeping Indians.

But hearing nothing, and feeling some curiosity, he whispered to Rosalie to keep back in the wood, while he went forward and found out what it all meant.

The truth of it was that Cuff didn't care much, if they were a party of Indians, although it seemed strange to him that none of them should awake at his approach.

But he was not afraid if there were a dozen of the fiercest warriors of the Sioux. When he had the power of summoning the Manitou at will, he might scorn the ill-will of the red-skins.

Groping around the camp for some ten minutes, Cuff was unable to find any one, and he finally scraped the embers together, threw on some wood, and blew them into a blaze, that he might make certain whether any were about.

He felt a little shaky, for it was possible that the Sioux, hearing his approach, had crept off into shelter, and would give him a volley before he could summon his friend Manitou.

But as the flame lit up the gloom, he looked around, and

seeing nothing, he came to the conclusion that whoever had occupied this camp-ground had been gone for hours, and there was no fear of their return.

Satisfied on this score, he called to Rosalie to approach, and she came forth rather timidly from the gloom wherein she had been in hiding.

"Don't you think this is a dangerous position?" she asked, as she came up.

Why so?"

"We are so close to the river that the light of the fire can be seen for a long distance, either up or down-stream, and it seems to me that it will be likely to attract attention from some parties that we do not want to see."

"Guess not," replied Cuff, who seemed to believe that every thing was in the best shape possible; "but if you feel uneasy, we won't stay here long. Don't you feel as though you would like to eat a half of a buffalo or deer?"

"Not quite to that extent, but something in the way of food would be very acceptable just now."

"It would be *very* acceptable to me," said Cuff, as he began groping around in the darkness. "I feel kinder faint and I hopes dat I'll find a few pounds dat de sarpints forgot, in dar hurry. Hullo! here am sumfin', sartin sure."

As he uttered this exclamation he picked up several bones that lay among the leaves, and to which considerable meat was yet clinging.

He offered these fragments to Rosalie, but she laughed and said she was not quite as hungry as that, and she would enjoy herself a great deal more in seeing him satisfy his cravings.

The darkey was quite successful in finding enough meat to answer his present purpose, and when he was satisfied that no more remained for him, he gave a yawn of enjoyment, and said:

"Wal, if you ain't too tired, we'll go ahead ag'in."

"I am ready— But hark!" she suddenly exclaimed.

In the stillness of the night they heard the sound of a paddle in the water, very close at hand, too.

"Let us hurry away," said the girl, in a frightened whisper. "They may be enemies, who are hunting for us."

"Who cares if dey am? I ain't afeard."

While he spoke, they caught sight of a canoe a short distance away, heading toward them and rapidly approaching!

CHAPTER XIX.

A HUMAN HOUND ON THE TRAIL.

For a few minutes, we must give our attention to incidents that are occurring elsewhere, and which greatly concern the characters who have borne a part in this story of ours.

After the Sioux had parted with their captives, and Co-wa-nok, with the happy belief that henceforth he was to be the happy favorite of Manitou, the Great Spirit, had signaled to his friends to land, and continue their journey homeward through the wood, the same awe and silence rested upon them as had characterized them when they heard that dreadful voice in the air above their heads.

The paddles were moved with a slower and more timid touch, and when the prow of the boat touched the shore, they stepped out of the boat without exchanging a word with each other.

By a common understanding among them, they fell into proper position, and the march was kept up for some time until a halt was made for supper, after which, by order of the chief, they advanced some distance further, to what he considered was a more suitable camping-ground.

Here, it will be remembered, the Sioux party were in camp at the time Long Ike and Parham came up with them and made the discovery that the captives were not with them.

Had Cuff been a witness to the actions of Buchees, the half-breed, during all this time, he would not have felt quite so hopeful as he had heretofore.

The scamp was doing a good deal of thinking on his own account, and he was gradually arriving at the truth of that which had puzzled him so greatly heretofore.

So long as the words that purported to come from Manitou were in keeping with his character, he had not the slightest suspicion of trickery and deception ; but, when the command came, plain and positive, that the Sioux should set the captives free, then Buchees woke up and concluded that he was drawing matters a little too fine.

In his profession as a thief, he had been among the whites enough to know that there was such a thing as ventriloquism although until now he had never witnessed an exhibition of it.

But by quite a long process of thought, he came to the conclusion that either the girl or the darkey was a remarkable master of the art, and had succeeded in pulling the wool over the eyes of the Sioux in a most brilliant style.

When the half-breed came to this conclusion, he was at the first camp-fire, and was debating very seriously with himself as to what should be done.

He was infatuated with the beautiful Rosalie, and was determined to get her at all hazards, but how to do it was the question which he asked himself.

He knew it was useless to attempt to convince Co-wa-nok that a trick had been played upon him. He would regard him as an impious wretch, and as likely as not would sink his tomahawk into his skull, the moment he comprehended what he was trying to do.

And yet, although the half-breed knew he had the power to do what he chose, yet he was afraid. True, neither Rosalie nor Cuff possessed any weapon of any kind, and he himself was armed with knife, pistol and gun, yet his courage was so weak, that he felt he must have a companion to assist him, and his delay in starting upon the pursuit was due to his embarrassment about selecting some one to go with him.

Buchees finally hit upon a plan that offered a chance to get around the trouble.

There were any number of bad, desperate men among the Indians who were willing and even eager to engage in this desperate work ; but their superstition was so strong, that some sort of deception would have to be used.

When he had decided upon the Sioux who was to be his companion, he stated to him that he wished his company upon a little hunt, in which he proposed to engage.

The red-skin was not unwilling, and accordingly they left the main party, and coming back to where the canoes had been left, selected the one which was most suitable for their purpose, and entering this, shoved out into the stream, the Indian using the paddle.

The half-breed supposed that Rosalie and the darkey would be likely to continue drifting with the stream for several hours; but, as they were given no paddles with which to assist themselves along, it would be an easy matter to come up with and overtake them.

He felt, furthermore, that the time had come when he must make some explanation to his comrade, and give him to understand plainly that they had started in pursuit of the two captives that their chief had released.

This was the difficult point, and the half-breed approached it with a great deal of timidity, very doubtful of the result.

The moment the warrior fully comprehended the object of the expedition, he ceased moving, and declared that he would go no further.

Further than that even, he avowed his purpose of turning round and going back, and he had dipped his paddle into the water for that purpose, when Buchees saw that the crisis was at hand, and all depended upon a little nerve, drew his revolver and cocked it.

“Do what I say, or I’ll put a bullet through your head.”

The presence of the pistol within a few inches of his face brought the red-skin to a sudden stand-still, and he concluded that he was in about the worst plight of his life.

Assuming control of his companion, the half-breed endeavored to persuade him of the legality of the enterprise upon which they had started,

He told him that if it had been Maniton that had spoken to them, his command had been followed out. They had been ordered to set them adrift in the canoe, and they had done so.

Beyond that, the wish of the Great Spiri had not been made known, and they would not be acting in disobedience to it, if they should follow them upon the land.

This was straining logic a good deal; but the Indian professed himself a convert to them—his conviction, no doubt.

hastened by the presence of the pistol still pointing toward him.

Still the half-breed was anxious to accomplish a little more, and he endeavored to convince him of the bare-faced fraud that had been perpetrated upon him, the chief, and the rest of the warriors.

This was a most difficult, and, for a time, a hopeless task ; but the half-breed persevered, and he illustrated what he meant, by making all sorts of sounds of which he was capable.

While he could not make the slightest approach to the remarkable skill of Cuff, yet the Indian, who was unusually bright and sharp-witted, got an idea of what was meant, and Bushee saw that he was in that hopeful state of mind, wherein he began to doubt his previous conviction.

So he worked all the harder, never ceasing his argumentative work until he had driven the truth home, and he saw that his comrade was with him heart and hand.

All this time they had sat motionless, the canoe drifting with the stream.

The half-breed lowered his pistol, and told his friend to resume paddling.

The Indian did so, without a moment's hesitation, and the light birch structure sped down the current, with great rapidity, the water flying from the bows, as it is seen to do from the sharp prow of the steamer, when under full headway.

Every thing was thus going as prosperously as could be desired, and the half-breed peered forward through the gloom, anxious to catch a glimpse of the canoe that contained the girl that had run away with his heart, as he delighted to express it.

"She's the prettiest woman I ever laid eyes on," he mumbled to himself, "and she shall be mine. If Co-wa-nok was such a fool as to let her go out of his hands, I ain't. I'd follow such a critter all the way to the Atlantic, till I had got her by some means or other. She is worth all the squaws among the Sioux.

At this juncture the Indian gave a grunt, which signified something, and looking ahead, the half-breed caught a sight of a camp-fire, burning upon the southern shore.

"I guess they're there," he said, speaking to his companion; "head toward the fire, and paddle fast."

Cuff and Rosalie were there, and it was their canoe which they saw approach, as we have described at the close of the preceding chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

JUST IN TIME.

WHEN Cuff caught sight of the canoe approaching through the darkness, his first suspicion was that it was Long Ike.

The presence of a second form undeceived him, and the next moment he saw that one was an Indian and the other a half-breed.

The canoe shot forward so swiftly that it had struck the shore, and the two had sprung out before he had time really to say any thing.

Rosalie stood like one paralyzed with terror, unable to speak for the moment, and unable even to flee to the shelter of the wood, as she would have done ere this, had she known who it was that was approaching.

As Buchees sprung out, and strode forward, he gave out an exultant laugh.

"Glad to meet you! Co-wa-nok was foolish to let you go, and I made up my mind that it was a shame to let this purty critter run loose in the woods, when there was such good-looking fellers as me that was dead in love with her."

"What business have you got to come after us?" asked Cuff, indignantly.

"Didn't I tell you that it was 'cause I was in love with the purty gal? And while I'm 'bout it, I'll advise you nigger that you'd better keep your mouth shet, if you don't want me to shet it in a way that will make it stay shet."

Cuff was about to make some impudent remark, still believing that his deception had not been detected, when Rosalie stepped forward and said:

"Did you not hear the orders of the chief, sir, that we

should be released, and has he sent you to bring us back to him?"

"Nobody sent me; I come myself, and I come for *you*, too, my purty one."

"But dare you, and dare this warrior disregard the commands of Manitou that spoke to you from the air—"

The rest of the question was drowned in the laughter of the half-breed, who, as soon as he could command his voice, said, in a brutal tone:

"That 'ere little game is played, my beauty. That dark is a cute one, and he shet up the eye of the Sioux, but he ain't quite cute 'nough to shet up my eye, by his sweet tricks of throwing his voice."

Cuff's teeth fairly chattered with anger and terror as he listened to these words, while Rosalie felt as if she wished the ground to open and swallow them all up.

"What do you mean to do with us?" she asked, thinking that she might as well know the worst at once.

The half-breed pointed across the stream as he made answer:

"About a hundred miles to the north of this creek I have my lodge. I have no wife in it. There I shall place you, as the mistress of my lodge. I mean to cross the river and start for home at once. We can reach there, I think, by to-morrow night, without makin' you tramp too hard."

This was the very thing that the girl was dreading. Something seemed to tell her that if she passed to the other shore again, she would have to bid good-by to all hope, and that there her friends would never be able to reach or rescue her.

She turned appealingly to Cuff, for she did not know what she could do.

The poor negro, as a last resort, performed a ventriloquial effort that ought to have succeeded.

While silence rested upon the party, something was heard that sounded like a faint whistle in the distance.

"Dat's Ike!" exclaimed Cuff, deliberately. "Keep up a good heart, Miss Rosalie, he'll be 'long purty soon."

The half-breed looked frightened, and turned his face toward the river, and while he held his face thus, he looked side

ways at the negro, and saw him make a peculiar sign to the girl.

That let out the secret and he turned about.

"See here, darkey ; you and me have been buttin' ag'in' each other a good many times, and every time I've won. I'm the feller that took charge of something less than fifty beavers that Long Ike cotched in his traps, and I know how hard you and him worked to cotch me, and you got sarcum vented every time.

"Then when you shet up the eye of Co-wa-nok, I stepped in and I fixed things straight, and now when you come purty near making us think that Old Dog was on the track, it's me that sees through the trick. But I begin to fear you'll be troublesome if you go with us, and I don't think we want you, so I'll bid good-by to you."

And then he turned to the Indian, and in the coolest manner possible, told him to take the darkey one side and shoot him. He spoke in the Sioux tongue, but Cuff had picked up enough of it to understand the command.

He showed no fear, and when the Indian started to move away he walked coolly with him.

It was death to refuse, and he believed he still had a chance of success by obeying.

"Out of respect to you," said the half-breed, turning to Rosalie, "I have had the red-skin take the darkey where you can't see the little job. Now, let me take your hand, and we won't wait for 'em."

He advanced toward her, when the near crack of a rifle was heard, followed by a dreadful groan.

"Why, he's quick with the job," remarked the half-breed, his horrid face lighting up with a smile ; "come, the night is passing."

"I will not go with you," said the horrified girl, recoiling as she would in the presence of a loathsome viper. "You are a murderer, and every thing that is vile—don't put your hand on me !"

The villain broke into his dreadful laugh again.

"You turned your back on me when in the canoe, and you knew I darsen't touch you. Now, I am master, and you can't help yourself. Come along ! for you've got to go."

And, taking another step, he seized the shivering girl by the wrist, and began dragging her toward the canoe.

"Have mercy! have mercy!" she prayed, as she tried to loosen the cruel grip upon her wrist; "let me go, I pray you. Heaven will smite you for this cruel deed!"

"Who cares for heaven?" replied the villain, as he persisted in his outrageous course. "I defy heaven and earth—"

The blasphemous words were still in his mouth, when the report of a rifle sounded upon the air, and with a gasp of agony, he dropped dead to the ground.

The next moment Long Ike and George Parham rushed forth to the camp-fire.

Immediately behind them came Cuff the negro.

"Rosalie! Rosalie!" called the happy lover, as he dashed forward and caught the girl in his arms. "I have found you at last. Thank the good Lord."

"Yes, thank him," added the girl, with an overflowing heart. "I was in despair and had given up all hope, when he came to me and he saved me."

Just then she caught sight of the smiling face of the negro, and she reached out and caught his hand, while her face lighted up with joy.

"You alive and well," she exclaimed. "I thought I heard the gun that killed you a few minutes ago."

"Dat ar' gun would have fotted me," said Cuff, very seriously, "if it warn't fur one thing. It war p'inted at de sar-pint instead ob me."

"How came that?"

"I s'pose de reason am dat Long Ike aimed it. Ain't dat so, Ike?"

When something like quiet was restored, explanations were made all around, and a general understanding arrived at.

Long Ike, it will be remembered, was much puzzled at the failure to see the captives among the Sioux that were gathered around the camp-fire in the woods, and, for a time, he took the most gloomy view possible of the situation.

But, after long thought, he sought out and discovered the place where the party had made their landing from the river.

Here there was but a single canoe, and this fact gave him the clue. Something was going on further down the river ; and, jumping into the single boat that remained, they sped away for life.

The camp-fire that guided the half-breed and his comrade to the right spot, also guided them, and they reached there none too soon.

When Cuff followed the red-skin to one side to meet his doom, the trapper put a bullet through the skull of the warrior, and left to Parham the pleasure of serving the half-breed in the same fashion.

All this understood, Long Ike was then made acquainted with the great "secret" which the darkey possessed, and which stood him so well in so many critical instances.

And Parham and Rosalie had a delightful time in exchanging their experiences since their memorable separation, a few days before, so many miles away.

All this occupied but little time, when they entered the canoe and started on the return.

By daylight they were far up the stream, and before night-fall the home of the trapper was reached.

Here the whole company made preparations for instant departure. The trapping season was almost over, and Long Ike gathered all his peltries together, loaded his extra pack-horse with them, and started with his friends for the settlements.

They reached the fort in safety, and thence proceeded eastward to St. Louis, where the trapper disposed of his goods, and settled down with his family, until the time should come around for him again to visit the wild regions of the North-west, there to pick up his precarious living amid all kinds of dangers.

Rosalie was shortly after joined in marriage to her lover, and Cuff accepted a liberal offer from the grateful couple to make his home among them, where his pay was very liberal, his food very abundant, and his labors very light.

THE END.

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